Hatred in the belly

Politics behind the appropriation of Dr Ambedkar's writings

~Ambedkar Age Collective

THE SHARED MIRROR

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THE SHARED MIRROR

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The Shared Mirror Publishing House shall endeavour to promote Dalit Bahujan literature and writers. It takes inspiration from the publishing efforts of anti-caste visionaries like Phule, Iyothee Thass, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Periyar and others.

It aims to further the anti-caste discourse, following the course set by *Round Table India*, the Dalit Bahujan information portal, through publishing poetry, fiction and non-fiction. It is driven by a sincere desire to radically expand the horizons of Indian writing in English and other languages by providing a platform to a wide range of marginalized voices across the sub-continent.

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~ We must shape our course ourselves and by ourselves.~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Speech at the Depressed Classes Congress held at Nagpur on August 8, 1930.*

Artist: Syama Sundar Unnamati

About the book

~ Anu Ramdas & Naren Bedide (Kuffir)

To annihilate caste is to liberate ourselves and begin the process of becoming a community of humans with shared values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Throughout the history of the subcontinent, socio-cultural revolts, anti-caste assertions, movements, literatures and leaders have worked at socializing people away from supremacist thought and towards an egalitarian mode of being. The most cogent exposition came from Babasaheb Ambedkar's analysis of the caste system, its origin, mechanisms and its annihilation.

Brahmin supremacy is the core belief system of the caste society and every Indian citizen is caught in its social, economic, political and psychological consequences, across religions and classes. Given the scale of humans negatively impacted by caste, any writer who comes equipped with a basic grasp of numbers would tread with great care and humility when dealing with the text that has liberatory content--for all Indians. How does one contextualize and introduce Babasaheb Ambedkar in an essay preceding the re-publishing of one of his important texts? This question demands of writers a great deal of thought and focus, and there is no doubt the team of people who have contributed to the *Annotated Critical edition of Annihilation of Caste* have done the same.

A writer competent in her subject can deploy a range of literary devices to invite and engage readers; there is no one specific way for a subject to be handled in a non-academic context. The reader's evaluation is the only measure of success for a writer's chosen strategy. However, in the case of historical figures and texts, the anticipation of readers' critical evaluation for subject competency, clarity and purpose is a natural given. And when the subject is Babasaheb Ambedkar and *Annihilation of Caste*, a contemporary imagination, which is both curious and informed about histories of modern societies would perhaps have evoked the names of the prominent founding fathers of democracies across the world. But with complete randomness Ms Roy invokes two women victims of horrific violence from two different geographies, cultural regimes and political

contexts, and says, 'If you have heard of Malala Yousafzai but not of Surekha Bhotmange, then do read Ambedkar'.

If this start is not confounding enough, she then takes the readers into a long detour, offering her reflections on Gandhi's personality and politics. Whereas, even a cursory reading of *Annihilation of Caste (AoC)* would impart awareness that it has little to do with personalities, including that of Gandhi or Ambedkar. It is a text about the institution of caste, its deep-rootedness in Hinduism, which offers ways to imagine and work towards its annihilation.

Ms Roy's perplexing introduction comes with its own title and is three times longer than the text it seeks to introduce. It has made several readers wonder if it is literary or academic or historical or fictional writing. Does it have a linear narrative or multiple narratives? Does it provide new insights or new research and so on?

Is there a message in *The Doctor and the Saint*? It probably lies between pages 30 and 36*. Here, annihilation of caste is posed and evaluated as a piece of utopian thinking, 'an impractical and unfeasible dream' of Babasaheb's as well as of the entire anti-caste tradition. Ms Roy then proceeds to compare *Annihilation of Caste* to Gandhi's utopia of Ram Rajya. As ludicrous as this formulation and comparison is, it clearly conveys her message as to which is the preferred utopia, and who is prescient and who fails:

"The rival utopias of Gandhi and Ambedkar represented the classic battle between tradition and modernity. If utopias can be said to be 'right' and 'wrong', then both were right, and both were also grievously wrong. Gandhi was prescient enough to recognise the seed of cataclysm that was implanted in the project of Western modernity: [...]

Ambedkar, on his part, was painfully aware of the iniquity of that past, but in his urgency to move away from it, he failed to recognise the catastrophic dangers of Western modernity."

The rest of the mostly tedious introduction of recycled material on caste and Gandhi vs Ambedkar debate is not without comic relief, though

inadvertent. One even gets to visualize Gandhi doing a blue throated Lord Shiva act! But often, it exposes Ms Roy's vacuous grasp of the dynamics of patriarchy in a caste society. We cannot hold her solely responsible for making absurd statements about 'untouchable' women in her introduction, for the editor's note points out that the manuscript has been peer reviewed by the finest scholars, which includes the leading feminist, Uma Chakravarti.

Apparently this peer review group has approved generalizations such as 'Men of the privileged castes had undisputed rights over the bodies of Untouchable women.' This comes with no annotations, it is delivered as a universal truth about a very large and very diverse group of women. Where is the basis for this, are these undisputed rights sanctioned scripturally? If yes, where are the annotations? Is it based on sociological analysis? If yes, where are the citations? One wonders what kind of feminist reasoning drove Ms Roy to make (and the peer review team of scholars to overlook, or endorse?) formulations such as this: 'She was more educated than her husband, so she functioned as the head of her family'. Wouldn't patriarchal orders be easily and quickly reversed if possession of higher education of women was reason enough to make wives function as heads of families? Also, the peer review group has approved regressive, stereotypical rhetoric which can neither be seen as feminist reasoning or angst, nor as offering any kind of clarity on gender relations in a caste society. For example, on page 17, she says, 'Love is polluting. Rape is pure.'

For an annotated, critical edition aiming to make Ambedkar's work gain 'the critical and scholarly attention it deserves', annotations go missing at crucial places. No evidence or names are provided when a spectacular claim of calling Babasaheb's *Annihilation of Caste* 'utopian' is partially and parenthetically attributed to some unnamed Ambedkarites (page 30). Annotations are skillfully omitted when a fake narrative about Ambedkar's financial status at the time of his death is conjectured from false and unverified assumptions (page 85).

In essence, Ms Roy's introduction and S Anand's attempt to make a 'scholarly' intervention on Ambedkar's personal and textual legacy exemplifies the symptomatic supremacist attitudes of the ruling class

Indians. It could at best be seen as being afflicted by an unexamined saviour syndrome and at worst, as a display of casual racism.

But *Hatred in the belly* is not about Arundhati Roy or S Anand or this particular project alone - that's a vulgar understanding being sought to be spread by certain detractors. It's against brahmanic hegemony at large. Though the critiques were triggered by Navayana's new *Annotated and Critical Edition of Dr Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste* and Arundhati Roy's introduction to it, the issues raised by the writers, collectively referred to as the 'Ambedkar Age Collective', in this book, cover a much wider range of hegemonic endeavours to erase, derogate, suppress or appropriate many epistemic tools of resistance against caste, over the ages. So it is as much about the RSS' attempts to hinduise Ambedkar as it is about the Roy-Navayana project, and much more.

~

This is an unusual book, in many senses. It has speeches, interviews, and articles, status messages from social media, poetry, cartoons and drawings. The writers range from students to activists to lawyers to researchers to teachers to office workers to scientists to poets and writers. They come from across India, from Delhi to Kerala, Rajasthan to Manipur and from across the diaspora, from London to the Bay Area.

The Telugu poet Madduri Nageshbabu says:

Feel a nausea stirring in my stomach

Feel like I am listening to Sanskrit Slokas

This diversity in forms of content and in the nature of the individuals who produced that content: it wasn't planned. You could say all the writers or contributors to this diverse content felt a common nausea stirring in their stomachs. *A familiar nausea.*

They place the aforementioned hegemonic endeavours where they belong, alongside the Sanskrit slokas.

Babasaheb's speech in many ways defined the Brahmin and Brahmanism. The Roy-Navayana team has tried to reverse it by defining the anti-caste movements, leaders and Amebdkarites as just utopian thinkers with no actionable vision to transform society. They even go to the extent of telling us that we cannot even dream of equality, that it will be impractical and unfeasible. Well, the Brahmin or the white man shall no more define us; our book, *Hatred in the belly* shall define them now. It continues the vibrant, pulsating collective process of annihilating caste.

The Shared Mirror is very privileged and honoured to have the opportunity of compiling into a book these diverse and invaluable articulations. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the writers. Special thanks are due to the Dalit Camera team led by Dr B. Ravichandran. These spontaneous interventions from multiple locations and languages interpreting knowledge appropriation were complemented by efforts of translation and transcription of speeches at *Round Table India*, by different writers - we are indebted to all of them.

This book records one aspect of the contemporary anti-caste discourse's attempts to reverse the socializing of prejudice, discrimination, and power hunger of caste society. Above all, it records the powerful, democratic resistance to dominant social forces' attempt to subsume *Annihilation of Caste* and Ambedkar into their normative discourse. *Jai Bhim*.

* *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition* published by Verso Books, London, in 2014.

Confronting Brahminical complacency

~ Gurinder Azad

This movement has no short cuts,
It's a caravan that sets its own course
as if following a law of nature.

Once, there was a deep chasm in this path
it would leave you stunned, just to imagine
how many sacrifices it took to fill it up;
We, the oppressed,
have the highest kind of love for these sacrifices.

We,
crores of people, know
from every lived moment
How to endure
To cower
To live
To fight
To die, quietly,
To raise our fists and wave them in the air, sometimes,
To cherish life.
All these filled, layer by layer,
the deep foundations of our path -
At some spots, blossoming like a flower
at others, dissolving into lava.
The histories of each word in the texts
recounting these experiences
are as deep as our sighs -
Does this text need any 'introduction'?
I don't think so.
But what I don't understand is
this one thing -
In the name of 'solidarity'
Will you do just anything you like?
Using the parachute of your social privileges

Will you land and install yourself ahead of this caravan too?
And tell us
How to walk?
How to think?
At a time when our agitating people, across the nation,
are using words as flaming sparks
to challenge the darkness your vile community has spread -
You want to tell us
How these sparks should blaze?
Don't jump on our heads in the name of solidarity!
Interrogate your own oppressor community first,
put yourself in our shoes, walk with us
in our pain, in our sighs, quietly suffer with us
look at the mirror each time!
After all, solidarity demands certain ethics!

As for Gandhi
This movement has surged far ahead of him
Please update yourself!

Translated from Hindi by **Akshay Pathak** *and* **Naren Bedide.**

Ambedkar does not need any introduction

~ The mischief done by the Brahmin scholars to historical research is obvious. The Brahmin scholar has a two-fold interest in the maintenance of the sanctity of this literature. In the first place, being the production of his forefathers, his filial duty leads him to defend it even at the cost of truth. In the second place as it supports the privileges of the Brahmins, he is careful not to do anything which would undermine its authority. The necessity of upholding the system by which he knows he stands to profit, as well as of upholding the prestige of his forefathers as the founders of the system, acts as a silent immaculate premise which is ever present in the mind of the Brahmin scholar and prevents him from reaching or preaching the truth. That is why one finds so little that is original in the field of historical research by Brahmin scholars unless it be a matter of fixing dates or tracing genealogies. ~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *'Who were the Shudras'*

Artist: Nidhin Shobhana

AoC does not need any introduction

~ Bojja Tharakam

(*Interviewed by* **Dr B. Ravichandran** *for* **Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes**)

Bojja Tharakam, veteran human rights activist, had been invited to converse with Arundhati Roy at the book launch function at Sundarayya Vignana Kendram, Hyderabad, which was to be held on 9 March 2014. The event was later cancelled by the publisher.

Dalit Camera talked to Bojja Tharakam on the new edition of 'Annihilation of Caste' introduced by Arundhati Roy. The text below is a transcript of the interview.[1]

I feel there is no need to introduce the book, *Annihilation of Caste*, either by Arundhati Roy or by anybody else, because it is a widely read book already. It was written in 1936, and it has had many editions.

The essence of the book has already reached the people. So I feel, there is no necessity for Arundhati Roy to introduce the text as if it was written for the first time.

Even if she wanted to introduce the book to the new generation she should have written about the book or the intentions of the author in writing that book. Nothing like that was done; she did not say anything about the book. She went on criticizing Ambedkar and I could say that she had high praise for Gandhi, though later she criticized him also. But the main purpose of her introducing that book, I feel, is that she wants to compare Gandhi and Ambedkar, which was not the intention of the author of *AoC*. He never wanted to compare Gandhi and himself. By that time Ambedkar had had many fights with Gandhi, they were fighting inside and outside and at the Round Table Conference too, they had their

1 *Dalitcamera Ambedkar*. Tharakam on Arundhati Roy's introduction to "*Annihilation of Caste*". Published on 23 March 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ2QL8T0Y-w (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

bouts. There is no necessity for Arundhati Roy to write that introduction highlighting Gandhi's contribution and in a way denigrating Ambedkar. Therefore, I repeat that there is no necessity to write that introduction and even without it the book goes on and will go on being read.

If at all she wanted to compare Gandhi and Ambedkar, she could have written a different text. Because *AoC* has nothing to do with Ambedkar and Gandhi. *Annihilation of Caste* has something to say about caste, about its annihilation, about the purpose of annihilation of caste. It talks about why Hindus should take up the work of annihilation of caste. That is the purpose of that book. If at all she wanted to introduce that theory to readers she should have written something about annihilation of caste, the necessity of that. Even after 1936, most of the views expressed by Dr Ambedkar still remain to be put into practice. Such things could have been written by her. Therefore, I feel that the introduction is totally without any purpose.

I feel, except to compare Gandhi and Ambedkar and put Gandhi on a high pedestal (there seems no other purpose). That is indicated in the title itself, 'The Doctor and the Saint'. Though she now claims that it is a sarcastic expression but the title cannot be seen as sarcastic. In the text she can use sarcasm but the title is 'The Doctor and the Saint'. Is she denigrating both Gandhi and Ambedkar? Or denigrating only Gandhi or only Ambedkar? Sarcastic expressions are used against both or against one? If at all it is sarcasm, then why should she use sarcastic comments on Ambedkar which he doesn't deserve? Therefore, I feel the very title is mischievous, misleading, denigrating and in bad taste.

Two things are there in this whole episode. One is she equates or compares Gandhi with Ambedkar. And praises Gandhi and puts Ambedkar down as she said in the letter: "junior partner!" Ambedkar's account here is as a junior partner in the annihilation of caste, probably.

Navayana claims that they are not casteists even though they are Brahmins. At this juncture, I feel whom are they fooling? Where is the necessity for S. Anand to say that *I am a Brahmin but still I am praising Dr Ambedkar? I am getting Ambedkar to the people so I am doing a great service to untouchables.*

Being a Brahmin I am doing all these things. He wants to say all this only to please Dalits.

Arundhati Roy wants to say the same thing probably. Because in the book she claims that she is a Syrian Christian. Where is the necessity to tell us that she is a Syrian Christian? *Though I am a Syrian Christian I am praising Ambedkar, I am assessing Ambedkar in a great way.* S. Anand says *though I am a Brahmin I am glorifying Dr Ambedkar by publishing his books* or whatever. Arundhati Roy claims her Syrian Christian status, they are probably top among the Christians; probably, they are very upper caste; probably she is a Brahmin convert or her ancestors were Brahmin. So she wants to claim her genealogy - *I am also a Brahmin or upper caste but still I am writing about Dr Ambedkar, introducing Dr Ambedkar.* Probably she wants to claim that by introducing Ambedkar she is doing great service to Ambedkar and Dalits. In fact, she has done great disservice to Ambedkar and Dalits by writing that preface.

They are only aiming, Anand is only aiming to publish *AoC* and market it. If they just simply publish the text, *AoC*, as it is, nobody would read it probably, he thought. There is no necessity for another publication by anyone about *Annihilation of Caste* so he wants to market *Annihilation of Caste* by getting a preface by none less than Arundhati Roy! Both Arundhati and Anand want to market the book with their introduction. He thought by doing this he did a great service because without Arundhati Roy's introduction this book would have not got this much publicity.

That is what they are claiming. It is very unfortunate. *Only because of Arundhati Roy's preface this book gained importance* (that is their claim). That is trash. Without Arundhati Roy, without Anand or without Gandhi that book had its own value. And it goes (is read); as long as caste is there, the book *Annihilation of Caste* written by Ambedkar goes (will be read). Nobody wants anybody's introduction to sell the book. It goes; it has its own way of reaching people.

She can write, there is no second opinion about that. Anybody can write or anybody can make any comment on Ambedkar and *Annihilation of Caste.* Nobody can prevent it; it is about freedom of speech. But that person who is writing something, or speaking something, about Ambedkar should

not denigrate Ambedkar. Should not belittle Ambedkar. If he/she wants to belittle Ambedkar, he/she can choose another platform. When Gandhi denounced his book, Ambedkar did not brush it aside. He put it in his book as an appendix.

The only way of criticizing Ambedkar, they thought, would be if they took the shelter of *Annihilation of Caste* and aired their views; without *Annihilation of Caste*, they thought they will be in danger (if they criticized him).

Annihilation of Caste is for Hindus as Dr Ambedkar claimed in his book itself. It is for Indians because Indians whether they are Christians or Muslims or Sikhs or Parsis, they are still carrying the element of caste in their religion. So it is for all Indians. Mostly for Hindus, but it is for all Indians. Dr Ambedkar in his book itself had written how caste can be annihilated, when it could be annihilated. The solution is given, but since 1936 nobody is taking up the solution, nobody is following its prescription. Nobody, from all sections, is thinking of eradicating caste, to annihilate caste. Because everybody wants caste including the last one in the ladder. Because everybody is getting some solace from this system. Not that they like it and therefore they want to retain it, but by compulsion they are retaining it. And if you want to annihilate caste you should annihilate all castes. So, Caste is a symbol for castes, therefore he (Dr Ambedkar) wanted to annihilate all castes. Therefore, it is meant for all! Caste will go only when all Indians, all Hindus, take up the cause of annihilating castes. Only then castes will be annihilated in the way in which Dr Ambedkar wanted this Caste to be annihilated.

This is not Babasaheb's Annihilation of Caste

~ Suresh Mane

(Dr Suresh Mane's speech at the **'The Colonization of Ambedkar: Caste Politics behind Roy-Navayana's Appropriation of Annihilation of Caste ~ A Discussion'** *held on 21 December, 2014, at University of Mumbai)*

Good afternoon friends, one day, restless Rahul met me at my office. He came with some anxiety, carrying along with him this book (Navayana's *AoC*), saying that there are lots of problems regarding this book, and some of our youngsters are engaged in opposing at least the commercial aspect of the book. So we should do something. I said, it is a good idea, it is your idea so you should do something. Our problem is that we are originators of ideas and we expect that somebody should do something. And that is always a wrong approach. So I told him let us go ahead, have a small debate, a discussion. By that method this program (the Colonization of Ambedkar event) has materialized.

Four, five people have already presented. Some of you must have also read this book, you may have your own right and wrong notions about the same. Certain points need to be understood, one is the assessment of Ambedkar when he was alive and then the post Ambedkar assessment - these are the two phases. Normally we say, Ambedkar is still less understood, more misunderstood, for which there might be different reasons. When he was alive he was carrying on with his struggle, which is one of the greatest human rights struggles of this world. He was also not assessed properly, even when he was alive - he was branded with different adjectives, as the 'stooge of the Britishers', 'the conformist Hindu', these were labels given by leftist people, communists. Even CPI passed a resolution in 1964 that Ambedkar should be limited to only Dalits. All this is on record. It is there in my book, *Glimpses of Socio Cultural Revolts in India*.

So, until the Round Table Conferences, he was nowhere. All of a sudden, he emerges on the whole horizon, and suddenly the entire Indian mass finds that here is a man who is challenging our social, political, cultural, economic ethos. And the man who challenges the whole ethos of a

particular society, naturally that society will not accept and digest that man's ideas and that is exactly what happened.

So after 1930, when he spoke at the plenary session of the 1st Round Table Conference and he systematically opposed the whole ideas and initiatives of the Congress and Gandhi, he was condemned in India. He was condemned by the newspapers. Now 1930s is a much later part. In order to understand Gandhi's opposition or the Congress-Gandhi model, one needs to understand how this model evolved. We know that the Congress model was evolved by Hume. Until 1905 the flag of the Congress was the Union Jack. 1905! So from 1885 to 1905 is 20 years. Gandhi comes to India at the age of 46, in 1915, after spending twenty years in South Africa. What was his job in South Africa? That is the most important thing to understand, if you want to understand Gandhi.

First, how and why did Gandhi go to South Africa? To help the Indian merchants and traders as a barrister, as a lawyer. Once there, initially he was fighting for the rights of the Indian traders in South Africa. While fighting for the rights of the Indian traders, he did some little things here and there, giving petitions, request letters to the British. By that method he came in contact with the British Empire or Britishers. The first one was 1913, in the First World War, where he enrolled himself as a volunteer for the British. For that, he even wrote a letter that some reward should be given to those like him who volunteered. And one British fellow replied, that *it is not a chocolate which can be given*. The same thing is also quoted by Arundhati Roy, that is also fine. So in 1915, when he returns from South Africa via England he is felicitated in England. For what? For the services which he rendered to the British Empire for 20 years. The same year, a big felicitation is held by Birla in Calcutta, who had a lot of money. *Hindustan Times* was owned by Birla; Gandhi's son, Devdas, was also employed at *Hindustan Times*, again the newspaper industry was at his disposal.

There is a book, *Gandhi betrayed my people* by a Bengali author M.K. Debnath. I have met him, he lives in Andaman and Nicobar. He was a refugee, during partition he came back to India, at the age of 12 years. Now he is a renowned doctor in Port Blair. And he has written a book on Gandhi, published by a foreign press, not an Indian press. I forgot to

bring the book. In that book he has said, whatever the experience the British Empire had with Gandhi for 20 years in South Africa, they were very happy with it. And they needed just such a leader to lead India's independence movement in the place of leftists or leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, and therefore Gandhi was a ready-made package prepared by the Britishers and dispatched to India.

Now, this kind of thinking is yet to come into general academia, intelligentsia or in the writings of scholars. This analysis is yet to develop, but it is a fact that Gandhi was promoted/endorsed, even established with the help of the British. Otherwise, the man who comes in 1915, at a time when there is no TV, no radio, no Internet - how can all Indians go after him? The Home Rule League is formed in 1914 where Jinnah, Motilal Nehru, K M Munshi have a problem, and Gandhi, who comes a year later, immediately becomes the president of the Home Rule League! How is it possible? So there was a systematic machinery used by the British to install a moderate man who would be suitable to the British empire. This theme is yet to be developed, even among the Dalit intelligentsia, it is absent in Dalit writings too. But this is another side which needs to be explored.

Second thing is that, we know that Ambedkar is an anti-establishment model. Do you accept this? Some of you may not, because you may have reservations. For example, any naxalite or someone with that kind of ideology may not. And initially the same problem existed even with PWG groups; even initial naxalite leaders never accepted Ambedkar as one of the radical models or anti-establishment models. They accepted him as a conformist model, moderate, reformist, something like that. But Ambedkar has been a radical anti-establishment model in the fullest sense of the term, not just in the economic or social sense but a complete anti-establishment model. While Ambedkar is an anti-establishment model, Gandhi is a perfect pro-establishment model. A perfect one.

The quote on railways that James Michael mentioned is here with me, read the book by SS Gill, Gandhi: *A Sublime Failure*. This book has very good analysis, please read it.

After considering these few facts, one can see what happened initially. When he (Ambedkar) was alive he was condemned like anything, that is

why he writes, "I am fighting for my greater swaraj, your swaraj is very limited, my fight is against my own people, your battle is very easy because you are fighting against someone else, outsiders, foreigners. Your fight is very easy, my fight is difficult". He was aware of this, he also admits that *I don't bother with what you are telling, how you are writing about me, describing me, how you are looking at me, I am not concerned with it. I am concerned with my job.*[2] He also knows what is the attitude of the whole system. So, when he was alive, whether it was the Congress party, whether it was the media, they all branded him like anything, as a leftist or rightist. Even at the RT conference, Gandhi refused to accept the existence of Ambedkar as a leader. He claimed that he was the leader of the whole of India, and thought *who are these others?*

Consider here the statue of Patel that is going to be built. One must remember the question that was asked to Patel: *who all are going to the Round Table Conference?* And Patel with contempt said that *some Mochhis and Ghaanchis have gone.* Mochhis and Ghaanchis! These days the Ghaanchi (Modi) does not understand this, what can we do? Modi belongs to Ghaanchi community, the oil pressers. That was Patel's statement, Mochhis and Ghaanchis - an attitude of utter contempt.

This slowly goes further, when the battle of both Ambedkar and Gandhi becomes clear. We have to understand the 'inclusive' politics of Gandhi. Through the medium of Gandhi and Congress no other force was allowed to exist in the country. A lot of effort went into this whether it was the Muslim League, or independent Dalits, there were attempts to accommodate them. All these facts have to be understood in that context.

After all this, we reach the post Ambedkar phase. Post Ambedkar is a neglected Ambedkar. Chalo, he is not even there. Now he is neglected, but the Dalit movement with people like Anoop Kumar won't sit quietly, will keep doing something or the other. Then starts this business. Till the 80s there was nothing. In the 80s, a little bit of literature appeared, Maharashtra

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2 "I tell you that I shall not deter from my pious duty, and betray the just and legitimate interests of my people even if you hang me on the nearest lamp-post in the street." *BAWS*: Vol- 17 (III)" p.81 & "It is my solemn vow to die in the service and cause of those downtrodden people among whom I was born, was brought up, and am living. I would not budge an inch from my righteous cause, or care for the violent and disparaging criticism of my detractors". Dr Ambedkar's role in National Movement by Dr D.R. Jatava, *Bauddha Sahitya Sammelan*, New Delhi, 1979 (p.43)

government brought out all his volumes, and so the corpus became available. Some awareness was created, some translations happened in other states, even in Kerala. Sometimes with wrong translations, for example, Scheduled Castes is translated as Harijan. When there is no Harijan at all. It should have been Arunthathiyars, even in Tamil Nadu some of the translation is wrong.

After neglecting Ambedkar, it was seen that Ambedkar is an emerging force, then the attacking method started.

After reading this book (Navayana edition) when I saw the model, I could not make out how many authors does it have? One, there is S. Anand. Then, there is Arundhati Roy, then Babasaheb and then in the end there is a note on Poona Pact by S. Anand. The context is not comprehensible.

I have taught LLM for 20 years, 18 PhDs have done their doctoral studies with me, I am myself a PhD. I understand research, and how to conduct scientific research. So before we subject Roy's book to analysis, let us analyze Roy's personality. Is Roy a philosopher? This is a direct question. Is she a researcher? Is she a historian? Then who is she? Because, say when I have written a book, it will be asked: you have written a book on Constitutional law, are you not aware that the spelling of Constitution begins with C or K? What is your authority?

And if we take the example of authority, we can look at her book *Broken Republic*. I have read it. She took up a journey, spent some time with our brothers who are here and there, interviewed them and whatever she learned from them, she wrote. Now, can it be considered as authentic? What is the academic or literary or historical value of this? Yes, she has one art - she can make the best presentation. Whether you like this art or dislike it, she manages to put out a marketable commodity.

If we look at this book, one, the first part has an editor's note by S Anand. So this book is not Arundhati's book at all. Because he is the editor. When do we need an editor? When there is editorial work involved. So, how did the editor come in? If there is an editor, it has to be in the name of Anand, but Anand's name is totally missing. At the end he writes on Poona Pact. I have a book on Poona Pact which is in its fourth edition, the first edition

was released by Kanshi Ram himself in 2000. But Anand has written such a short note that there is nothing in it, not even the crux of the matter. Then why write about it? It is so out of context.

AoC is not an ordinary book. Our friends have referred to Kanshi Ram, who could not sleep for three nights after reading that book. Among us, we fall asleep when we read books, and some read because they are not able to fall asleep and read in order to sleep (laughs). He could not sleep for three nights, and the whole process (BSP) started from that point. Therefore, there must be some kind of life in that book. When this book (Navayana's edition) was shown to me, I said this book is not Babasaheb's at all. Babasaheb's *AoC* is here (holds up another edition of *AoC*). Babasaheb's *AoC* is without footnotes. And this (Navayana's) *AoC* is with footnotes. And whose footnotes? In Roy's introduction [itself], 170 footnotes have been added. These are your footnotes. There is an original book, on which reference numbers are thrust with footnotes at the bottom- how can it be Babasaheb's *AoC*? Babasaheb's is without footnotes, reference work is not there at all. What did they do here? They took Babasaheb's original text and their footnotes are forced on it. So the title is wrong. They must change. They cannot give it this title, *Annihilation of Caste*. I will talk about the legal aspect later.

Even the footnotes are of such poor quality, if we do their postmortem, it will prove very costly for them. It is bad. Look at this, on page 47, she says, "*AoC* is often called, even by some Ambedkarites, Ambedkar's utopia. It is an impracticable, unfeasible dream." Arre, you are making a sweeping statement! What kind of an author are you if you are not supplementing your general sweeping statement with any reference? This is not a quality of a good author. If you people are writing a novel, it is fine. But if you are writing on a historical context, this is called *ghatiya* writing. This is not even literary writing.

You are supplementing Ambedkar's writing with footnotes. Now, who is going to supplement your writing? Who should be hired? You are making a general sweeping statement that Ambedkar's idea is a utopian one and that even some Ambedkarite scholars agree. Arre, to make such a statement, as I said, her total writing is without sound foundation. Some writers develop a tendency to be critical and controversial. Arundhati is

one of them. We don't have any personal grudge, I have never met her, never interacted with her. No personal grudge. But some writers have that kind of tendency that they want to be that way, so that they can occupy the market.

Have a look at the art of occupying the market which is reflected in this book also (reads excerpt from A. Roy's *Broken Republic*). She quotes from her earlier book in her introduction to *AoC*. In the former she says, "The Indian constitution, the moral underpinning of the Indian democracy was adopted by the Parliament. It was a tragic day for tribal people. The Constitution ratified the colonial policy and made the state the custodian of the tribal homelands. Overnight, in turn, the tribal population became squatters on their own lands."

This has been quoted in her introduction to *AoC*. You should cross-reference, and say that you are quoting from your own book.

Further she says, "Constitution has limitation with respect to revolution." Arre, even the Soviet Union had to make a constitution after their revolution. This is not your area. For this, dedicated scholarship is needed, learning is needed. After reading newspapers, watching television and writing a story while sitting in an airplane, you call it authentic scholarly work? It is foolish. This is a mockery.

At many places, she asserts such things. Arundhati Roy, by her own admission, at the launch of the book at Columbia University said that she had chosen not to publish her text as a "standalone book" because she is pretty sure "it would have been banned or disappeared in some ways, so it was a bit of a Trojan horse operation." So, in order to sell her own book, she needed the help of Ambedkar. *Kyun bhai*? If you are such a revolutionary, why do you need Ambedkar's help? Stand on your own strengths!

The title of the book, 'The Doctor and the Saint' - one of our friends from Andhra told us the title was mistranslated in an excellent way in a Telugu daily as *Vaidyudu* and *Pravakta*. Doctor and Prophet. Defending the title, 'The Doctor and the Saint', Arundhati Roy says, even Ambedkar has described Gandhi as a saint. Ambedkar has described Gandhi as not only

a saint but as a political saint. The adjective is there. That adjective this lady has cleverly removed. He called him a political saint. The title should have been very clear, The Doctor and the Political Saint. She removes the word political.

Her frank admission at Columbia University says, "I feared my book might get into trouble because I wrote a lot on Gandhi." But I say, you buy Ambedkar, you get Mohandas Karamchand free. One thing, our own youngsters have to keep in mind, is that in *AoC* there are at least 15 or 16 very important issues. Gandhi is not even there in the whole text, he comes later in the appendix. Appendix is appendix. It is not the main body.

After *AoC* was published, Gandhi felt bad, and in his Harijan magazine in 1936, he wrote in an issue that 'Ambedkar is not a man who will easily be allowed to be forgotten.' He made this accusation. Ambedkar responded to that. In 1936, Gandhi was an established leader, Babasaheb was not as well established as he was in 1946 or 50 or 55. This was 1936. So the book *Annihilation of Caste* is not about Gandhi, kindly remove such a view, if held by some youngsters who have not read the original book.

There was the Jat Pat Todak Mandal at Lahore, whose agenda was annihilation of caste, in order to reform, at least break it a little. On their invitation, this speech was prepared for their conference. The Congress policy towards annihilation of caste was discussed first. And in that context Babasaheb's very important quotation, which this lady has not quoted anywhere, relates to Surender Nath Banerjee's claim that the 'Congress party is competent to deal with social issues'. And Babasaheb Ambedkar gave such an excellent response, "Every man who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class."

This is such a powerful quote, and it is not anywhere in this introduction, instead it only has irrelevant tiny bits and pieces. The main thesis is not there, other matter is also missing, for example, the *AoC* talks about how the Socialists took no part in annihilation of caste. About this too, Roy is silent. Similarly, Babasaheb's observation: "turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster."

This finds no mention or discussion. Then there is caste and its effect on Indian society, one of the biggest effects is on the intellectual class. And we have to remind ourselves of the remarks made by Babasaheb on the intellectual class in *AoC*. I will read it now:

"In every country the intellectual class is the most influential class, if not the governing class. The intellectual class is the class which can foresee, it is the class which can advise and give lead. In no country does the mass of the people live the life of intelligent thought and action. It is largely imitative and follows the intellectual class. There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent and disinterested it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a proper lead when a crisis arises. It is true that intellect by itself is no virtue. It is only a means and the use of means depends upon the ends which an intellectual person pursues."

This is very important. How you are going to use your intellect? Ambedkar says, "An intellectual man can be a good man but he can easily be a rogue. Similarly, an intellectual class may be a band of high-souled persons, ready to help, ready to emancipate erring humanity or it may easily be a gang of crooks or a body of advocates of a narrow clique from which it draws its support."

This clearly needs to be applied (pointing to the Roy-Navayana edition) while analyzing anti-Ambedkarite discourse, anti-Dalit discourses if you can call it that, we have to understand this kind of thing.

Finally, to sum up, we can do a lot of postmortem, but I don't want to go into that. In this book, she has made 2-3 points which are very good. One, history has been very unkind to Ambedkar, and very favourable to Gandhi, this is correct. Second, she says, Ambedkar has to be introduced to the western audience. I refer to her reply to Dalit Camera: "I was writing for those in India as well as outside who are new to the subject for whom caste is some exotic Hindu thing, I saw a new line of a handbags in a departmental store in the US called Brahmin, I am sorry, if you felt hurt."

But even if we accept all this, the final conclusion of this book is also problematic. Now, you are debating about the content, how it should be, the last sentence in the conclusion is a very problematic area. How is it problematic? Look at this, she gives an example: in the last days of Babasaheb, he was in need of money to publish his book Buddha and his Dhamma, he asked governmental assistance for the funds from Govt of India. Because it was given to other books. So he asked. But was rejected. Roy infers from that: "He wore suits, yes, but died in debt".

Now this is a very cheap method of commenting. Ambedkar never died as a debt-ridden man. He had huge property, lands, which he gave to different trusts and societies which were not in his name. Neither was his family debt-ridden. But any general reader, who doesn't know about Ambedkar, what will he get from this introduction? He will get an impression that Ambedkar mismanaged the finances of his own household. This about the man who wrote on the mismanagement of the provincial finance in British India (laughs), they probably would not know, probably they don't know.

I see the root of this comment you know from where? I have worked for 30 years in 11 states at the grassroots level, including Kerala, and one day I visited a chamar's shop, what we call *kataikamgar*, small shop. I looked up and asked arre, you have Bapu's picture here, where is Baba's photo? He answered: when we don't have clothes, Bapu is wearing langoti, but Babasaheb is wearing suits. That was the answer.

Now, if that is the attitude of Arundhati Roy reflected in this book, it is pitiable. Pathetic. Such a cheap comment is made by her.

Finally, she raises a question, "Can caste be annihilated?" and she says, "Not unless we show the courage to rearrange the stars in our firmament, not unless those who call themselves revolutionaries develop a radical critique of brahmanism, not unless those who understand brahmanism sharpen their critique of capitalism." She is suggesting methods also!

In the entire caste discourse, she has even touched Dalit panthers but she has not dared to touch Kanshi Ram. She should have read the speech by Kanshi Ram which was delivered at the first international convention at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There, Kanshi Ramji has given a new kind of

theory of *AoC*: *that so long as caste is beneficial to the upper castes, it will never be annihilated. The day on which caste will become a liability to the upper castes, they will say, hands off, bye bye.* And that will be the beginning of caste's annihilation. I was lucky to have spent many years in his company. I was groomed and trained in that period. He used to say, 'Caste is a double edged weapon, so far it is coming from top to bottom, it is falling down, the day on which it will start moving up with the same speed from bottom to top, the people will say now enough'.

To sum up the whole debate, if she is posing the question 'how is it possible?' Answers are many, but one answer could be given: so long as caste remains a beneficial factor to the protectors of the system, it will remain. Let it be proved as a disaster to the protectors and they will say bye bye to caste. Those stages are coming, slowly, it may take time, but annihilation of caste is possible. The only thing is that you shouldn't try to annihilate the very author of *AoC* instead.

From Manusmriti to Navayana Publishing

~ The wall built around Caste is impregnable, and the material of which it is built contains none of the combustible stuff of reason and morality. Add to this the fact that inside this wall stands the army of Brahmins who form the intellectual class, Brahmins who are the natural leaders of the Hindus, Brahmins who are there not as mere mercenary soldiers but as an army fighting for its homeland, and you will get an idea why I think that the breaking up of Caste among the Hindus is well-nigh impossible. At any rate, it would take ages before a breach is made.~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

Artist: Syama Sundar Unnamati

Savarna India under permanent siege

~ Anoop Kumar

I, Ravidas, proclaim all Vedas are worthless. ~ Sant Ravidas.

Nishan Singh was a freedom fighter, who fought against the British to gain freedom for the country and was martyred. A Rajput whose memory must be cherished, his life celebrated. Therefore, we have statues, a memorial, a school, and other government buildings named after him in Baddi, his village in Bihar's Rohtas district. A village of very prosperous Rajput landlords - many among them are now doctors, engineers and teachers posted in neighbouring big cities but are quite steadfast in maintaining their linkages with the village. They regularly visit to take care of their lands, dispense justice to the local people, and regulate the activities run in and around the village for cherishing the memory of the slain freedom fighter.

It is a village of patriots. Every year on Independence Day, Rajputs hoist the tricolour, take out a rally, fire guns, and sing praises of Nishan Singh and the country. The completely landless and impoverished Dalits are patriots too. They also hoist the tricolour. At least they try to.

Since the last few years, both groups try to hoist it at the same place, just in front of 'a modest nondescript structure', as this newspaper[3] report calls it - a Dalit temple, dedicated to the memory of a Dalit saint, Ravidas. And not at any of the memorials inside the village dedicated to the martyred freedom fighter, Nishan Singh. This modest nondescript structure was the result of enormous efforts and sacrifices made by the local Dalits and it took them more than 30 years to build it. In June 2013, they were even able to install a statue of Sant Ravidas, the 15th century poet saint, inside the temple.

But the Dalit saint was no freedom fighter. He did not give up his life for the country, at the altar of Mother India. He was a mere utopian who,

3 Gaikwad, Rahi. "Bihar village flags off caste violence on I-Day", *The Hindu*, 21 August, 2013.

when not singing or complaining to God about the sufferings of his own community, dreamt about Begumpura (a land without sorrow):

> *Aisa chahu raaj main, jahan mile saban ko ann,*
> *Chhot baade sam basse, Ravidas rahe prasan*
>
> [May such a kingdom come where everyone
> gets enough to eat, God resides in every man,
> small or big, and Ravidas is happy]

In the land of patriots this was a great sacrilege, an insult to the memory of Nishan Singh, to the Rajputs and perhaps even to the country. And they opposed it from the beginning, from the day the idea came to the Dalits to have their own public space in the village where even the local school has a Rajput name attached to it. There were multiple attacks, ransacking of Dalit property throughout these 30 years, but when all this could not stop the Dalits, the Rajputs decided to do something else.

"They want Nishan Singh's statue before the temple.[4] They do not like the fact that when you cross the area you first lay your eyes on the Ravidas statue", the temple priest Teja Ram Sadhu told the newspaper reporter. He was lying in the hospital grievously injured after the attack on the Dalits by hundreds of well armed Rajput men, led by a father-son duo, both government doctors posted in a far-off city. True to their patriotic nature, they had come to participate in the flag hoisting ceremony in the village. And the Dalits by resisting them had committed a grave crime.

"They came with *lathis*, rods, firearms, and petrol bottles. Most of us fled, but the older people, women and children could not escape. First, they started beating up people, then they broke down the temple gate, vandalized the idol and set everything on fire. Some children were playing on the temple roof. They pushed them off. They caught hold of the elderly and beat them with *lathis*," Kashinath Ram, the temple chairman, told the same newspaper reporter.

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4 ibid.

An 80 year old Dalit man was killed, and 54 others, including women and children, were injured. It happened on August 15, 2013, the day India and all Indians got their freedom, 50-60 years ago, some say.

Asked if they wanted Nishan Singh's memorial exactly in front of the temple, Radharam Singh, a retired teacher from the community replied, "Where else? This land belongs to the martyr. He was a freedom fighter. Moreover, the temple ends with the threshold, after that it is government land. Does any memorial require any land papers?" he asked.

"All of them [the attackers] are *zamindars* owning vast tracts of land," pointed out Kashinath Ram. "But still they are after these six decimals. They have a school in the name of Nishan Singh. They have even usurped much of the government land in village. We are all landless. The problem is that it hurts their caste pride to have the Ravidas temple in front, with their school located behind it."

But then not all Rajputs are the same. Not all are that patriotic. Not all are too violent. A few even sing songs of resistance, of emancipation for others. Some even claim to have left the village Baddi behind, forever. Some even get amazed at the resistance and resilience shown by Dalits, against all odds, to survive in the situation of permanent siege singing praises to their deity, constructing a temple, installing a statue, despite their meagre resources, despite their children going hungry, unschooled, suffering unbearable violence. All for a poet saint who had nothing but utopia to offer.

It has to do with the Dalit deity and his awe-inspiring spell on these otherwise miserable Dalits, they conclude. It is their fanatic devotion to the utopian deity that is not allowing them to leave their ghetto and join the waiting army of poor Rajputs raring to go for the *Revolution*, for their instant emancipation. The deity has even turned them into tricolour-hoisting statists, and therefore, accomplices in the state's killings of Kashmiris and Manipuris. This spell needs to be broken and the deity thoroughly exposed for being fake, incapable of any miracles, they decide. Only to emancipate Dalits, to lead them out of their blind beliefs.

Some kinder Rajputs might even be looking at the miraculous powers of the deity and suddenly developing the desire for bringing it out to the entire world. He needs a shrine, right at the centre of the village, right alongside Nishan Singh's, and our high priest to deliver sermons, to tell everyone about his miraculous powers, to sing hymns in his praise. A powerful deity requires an equally powerful priest to do the introduction, and for the world to recognize. It is your ghetto, it is your illiterate priest who no one listens to except you, it is you that is holding such a powerful deity back from conquering the world, they might say earnestly.

But it was never about the deity. The deity never offered any miracle. It is his followers that made the deity appear all miraculous, all powerful. With great sacrifices and enormous effort, they even turned him into their most potent weapon; his simple words preaching equality for all, into texts of resistance. And his statue into the very image of their unassailable challenge to everything that exists in that village. Thereby, rejecting all kinds of Rajputs, their deities, their priests, their marble shrines together with all Rajput narratives about themselves, about Dalits.

The Rajputs of Baddi village know it too well. It is not the idol in the Dalit temple that they abhor, it is not the ramshackle building erected on one decimal land by Dalits that they feel insulted about and want to destroy. It is this very rejection by Dalits of everything they stand for that scares them the most. They know Dalits staking claim on their lands, their schools, on all the village resources which they have usurped using their narratives and their deities, is just a small step away. Therefore, it is not the Dalits of village Baddi, it is the Rajputs who are under permanent siege.

And being unable to break free, many Rajputs attack, they kill, they destroy, a few start distorting the Dalit resistance, calling them fanatics, mere deity devotees. A few pretending to be free, claiming to have left the village Baddi behind forever, try to take the deity out, wishing away his people and their struggle, to preserve him at their money-minting, beautiful and large shrines, where his people cannot even enter. To hand him over to their enchanting priest, to reduce him to just one minor addition to the long list of their own deities. All in good faith, it is all for the deity, it is all for his people, they say.

No, you are not allowed to break free from the siege. By talking about our deity, you are not allowed to reproduce the same exploitative structures that we erected our deity against. Our deity is merely a manifestation of our struggles, our claims and you just cannot bypass all these pretending to be free, pretending to be mere individuals, pretending not to be part of the very same structures that we are fighting against and without acknowledging your role in perpetuating it.

When Sant Ravidas was proclaiming that the Vedas are worthless, he was not opposing the freedom of expression of the Brahmins but rejecting all their interpretations of the world and all the hegemonic structures that came along with the Vedas that made their interpretations the only gospel truth.

A tactical, brahminical trick

~ U. Sambashiva Rao

(*Recorded by* **Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes**)

Veteran political activist U. Sambashiva Rao was one of the key speakers at the **'Democratic Debate on Appropriation of Ambedkar's Writings'** *held on April 10, 2014, in Hyderabad. He is the Chairman of the BC Mahajana Sangham and has played an active part in many people's movements - starting with ultra left Marxist-Leninist struggles to identity based agitations inspired by Ambedkar-Phule thought - in Andhra Pradesh over the last forty years. The following text features his intervention[5] at the debate.*

Non-Dalits, whether they're Reddies or Kammas or Brahmins or even BCs and Tribals or Marxists who are not Ambedkarites or Socialists.. whoever it is, we will understand them by observing where they express their likes and dislikes.. Ilaiah garu says Arundhati Roy wrote as a liberal democrat and not as an Ambedkarite or a Marxist. If someone writes as a Marxist, we can understand that angst. Also, if someone writes as an Ambedkarite, we can see that anguish too. But here, what we see is not the angst, but a feeling - did she write this with the tactical objective, perhaps, of erasing the image that has been stamped on her community, I felt?

Here, I wish to differ with my friend, Ilaiah.[6] It's (Navayana edition) not a question of methodology. Even if this is a methodological approach, this methodological approach seems like the tactical approach of a liberal Brahminical democrat. That is my assessment. Coming to the textual

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5 *Dalitcamera Ambedkar*. U. Sambashiva Rao: I disagree with Ilaiah and condemn Arundhati Roy's brahminical intellect. Published on 11 April, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5RtF5SRj_s (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

6 In his talk, which preceded U. Sambashiva's, Prof. Kancha Ilaiah proposed that Roy's introduction be separated from *AoC*. He had advocated the same in an earlier meeting held at the University of Hyderabad. Ref: Sirapangi, S Swaroop. "Arundhati Roy tilts towards Gandhi: Prof. K. Y. Ratnam", ***Round Table India, 31*** March, 2014. Available at: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7325:arundhati-roy-tilts-towards-gandhi&catid=129:events-and-activism&Itemid=195. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

aspects – there are many – but here, I'd like to refer to the context, offer my observations along with the context in which she writes.

One, when we talk of context/background, unless I offer my explanation about the three phases or steps this context comprises of, we might not be able to understand why Arundhati Roy wrote this book now. Perhaps, because we had journeyed through all the three phases, participating in people's movements, we caught the scent immediately: on why this has happened now. To understand why this book has happened *now*, we need to understand why Arun Shourie's book happened *then*. The reasons why Arun Shourie wrote that book only *then* and not earlier. That was also a historic moment/context. If we go back a little further, Ambedkar, who lost both his health and several years of his life working on the constitution, had once said that he had done donkey's work to complete the job. But he was not awarded the Bharat Ratna *then*, even after making such huge sacrifices. He was not granted the honour even after he died. We will also have to understand *when* he was awarded the Bharat Ratna.

If we piece these three events together, only then shall we understand why Arundhati wrote this book now.

More on this shortly, coming to the immediate issue of this book's launch in Hyderabad.

If we look at the making of Gandhi into a Mahatma, the saint..to digress, when we talk of 'The Doctor and the Saint' and its translation into Telugu, to put it in a light-hearted manner, all one can say is that Ambedkar was a great social scientist while Gandhi was a mere *sanyasi*. Isn't that the right translation, doesn't saint mean a *sanyasi*?

The people at *Andhra Jyothy* probably thought that using the word *'sanyasi'* may lead to readers to think of him as a s*annaasi* (worthless person, in Telugu), therefore they changed it to '*pravakta*' or prophet. They're big interpreters too! They had received a message saying that this meeting was about to happen,. They called me up, trying to probe. They said, we have received a message, that a meeting was about to happen, but there were not enough details in the message to publish as a news report, *is it true that you're also participating in the meeting?* So I said, *yes.*

Then they responded saying, *why do you have to take a negative approach? Until now, whether they were Marxists, brahminists or socialist brahminists or nationalist brahminists, they all remained brahminists, in your final analysis. As part of that you criticize Vara Vara Rao, you criticize Balagopal, you criticize Ranganayakamma, you criticize Arun Shourie..you criticize them all. But Arundhati Roy, even though she's also a Brahmin, a Marxist, a Maoist sympathizer and a great liberal democrat.. and someone who protested against LPG, despite being all this she writes about Ambedkar, highlighting him positively, but why can't you stand even that?*

Therefore, they said, *it would be good if you change this negative approach. If this meeting (*Democratic Debate on Appropriation of Ambedkar's Writings) *does happen, please don't express this negative perspective there*, they cautioned us through hints. But we know what that newspaper's stand is, why they have these prophets there. That's why I said, doesn't 'saint' mean a *sanyasi*?

But what we learn from the views expressed through various signals by *Andhra Jyothy* is that: whether in the pre-independence period or in the post independence period, no one from the upper castes ever looked at Ambedkar positively; Arundhati Roy is the first one to do so, therefore, they're hinting that we shouldn't look at her negatively. I understood that in exactly the same way – I have been waiting all my life to see if what Ambedkar had once said would be falsified. He had said, the pope might become a revolutionary but the Indian Brahmin can't ever become a revolutionary ('*if a man who becomes a Pope has no wish to become a revolutionary, a man who is born a Brahmin has much less desire to become a revolutionary*' - exact quote). Whether he's a Marxist or a socialist or whatever-ist..

We can't fathom how much heartburn, what kind of experiences he must have gone through all his life to say that. I have been waiting, hoping, all my life to see if those words would ever be proven wrong. When I learnt Arundhati Roy had written this book, I was hoping again that she would finally prove him wrong. Even she couldn't prove his words wrong.

Therefore, I express my serious objections to this book. The tricks of brahminism, howsoever cleverly expressed, can never remain totally incomprehensible. That is why Mahatma Phule had said: a Brahmin is nothing but a bag of tricks. This is also a trick, a tactical trick.

Her books on tribal communities, their autonomy, rights and democracy are of good quality and have achieved great popularity, they say. That is a positive aspect to consider. But I feel, if the same issues had been raised by a BC or a Dalit or a Tribal, with the same clarity or with more clarity, with the same commitment or with more commitment, with the same spirit of sacrifice or courage – wouldn't they be 'encountered' rather than gain such popularity?

I still nurse these doubts. I am not saying that if you belong to an upper caste in this country you should not talk about the tribals or the Dalits or the backwards or the poor. But caste is such a cunning system, and those castes which introduced this system in this society have not yet escaped from its framework. This book itself can be cited as conclusive evidence of that fact.

I'll refer to 2-3 instances. A little while ago I had said that to understand this book, we need to understand the background of it in three steps. I repeat, my assessment is that this is a tactical methodological text. The references, the annotations and all the other information provided with the book seem to mock or indirectly deride the original text. This is the strand that we see running throughout the book.

The organizers of this event think that the title of the introduction is wrong, that it should be detached from the book because it is methodologically not right. They seem to be right, but if we could look at this text from another angle, as representing a liberal brahminical tactical approach..

If we look at Indian history until now, we see that their (Brahmins/ Savarnas) revolutionary, democratic, positive, theoretical, philosophical contribution amounts to nothing. You will find nothing even if you search and search through a microscope. They might support original contributions of others, but you won't find a single creative idea of theirs.

Nowhere. Moreover, they become more famous than us by highlighting our contributions, contributions from Dalit-Bahujan classes.

I'll cite an example in support of this fact. She (Roy) had analysed tribal life. After she had done that, many people started praising her as a kind of authority on tribal life. Yes, she did offer some good analysis, but until the tribals themselves brought the issue of their autonomy and rights to the forefront, before anyone else - did any of us recognize their contribution in this country?

Similarly, Ambedkar's perspective is different from hers. Why did Ambedkar place the SCs and STs in the same category of reservations? Because he looked at it from the perspective of caste. Because the Dalits live outside the village and the tribals live outside the plains. Both are outsiders. So he attempted to see all those suffering from this kind of exclusion, to look at both of them from a single perspective.

In this country, if the tribals try to enter the caste society, the upper castes close their doors, but they don't enter the lower caste homes even if their doors are opened. Therefore, Ambedkar said, as it is not possible to enter the larger society except through the door of caste, because caste acts as an obstacle, the Adivasi society has acquired this unique quality in India. Has any historian ever articulated those two observations? Does she talk about that? Does she say anything beyond what he said?

I'd like to talk about a related issue here. Those who work according to the Marxist ideology.. I too worked as a Marxist activist, I worked in Adivasi areas for five years, in agency areas.[7] There, we worked on a struggle with the objective of distributing land belonging to the landlords among the poor farmers, thinking from a class perspective. Finally, when the Polavaram project was being built, it turned out that half the lands that we had distributed were in the hands of non-Adivasis while the other half were with the Adivasis.

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7 These are predominantly tribal areas in the districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and Mahboobnagar in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
Ref: Thurston, Edgar. Provincial Geographies of India: The Madras Presidency with Mysore, Coorg and Associated States. *Cambridge University Press*, First published 1913.

How did this happen? When we had distributed them, we had found nothing wrong with our objective, because we had fought against the feudal landlords to protect the interests of the prosperous farmer, the medium farmer, the poor farmer and the landless labourers.

The Adivasi was somewhere at the bottom of this last category of 'landless labourers'. We had distributed the land according to a class perspective, in tune with the objective of opposing feudal landlords. Therefore, some of the other categories of tillers like the middle class farmers also benefited from our strategy. Who were these middle class farmers? Those who had migrated from the non-Adivasi regions to the Adivasi regions and occupied their lands.

But how did a progressive legislation like 1/70[8] emerge out of the same Naxalite movement? A legislation that stressed: Adivasi lands for Adivasis only, that non-Adivasis cannot have any right over Adivasi lands (same as in the case of lands 'assigned' by government to the poor, weaker sections).

Without going into much detail, I'd like to touch upon the important issues in this regard: the Adivasis cannot live outside the forests, just as fish cannot live out of water. Therefore, non-Adivasis – whether it is Backward Classes or Dalits or the poor, whoever it is, those who live outside the forests unlike the Adivasis who are the most marginalized – cannot claim any right over the forestlands because the Adivasis have first claim over it. That is the purpose behind the legislation.

The independence movement, the movements led by the Marxists and the communists during the Telangana armed struggle, the struggles led by the Naxalites in later period – how do these people (the left) view these struggles? They say the movement led by Komuram Bheem[9] was against

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8 Regulation 1 of 1970 (popularly referred to as *1 of 70*) refers to an important feature of the A P Scheduled area Land Transfer Regulation (A P S A L T) Rules. It stipulates 'that until the contrary is proved, any immovable property situated in the Agency Tracts and in the possession of a person who is not a member of ST shall be presumed to have been acquired by such person or his predecessor in possession through a transfer made to him by a member of ST and the burden of proof lies with the non tribal'. Ref.: http://apland.ap.nic.in/cclaweb/agencyrules.htm (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

9 Gond tribal leader who fought against the repression of the Nizam state machinery and non-tribal exploiters. He was martyred in 1940. Ref: Reddy, Kasula Pratap. Komuram Bheemu (Jeevitham-Poratam). *Telugu Akademi*, 2012.

imperialism and feudalism. Ok, the independence movement was an anti-imperialist struggle and the armed struggle was against feudalism. But the movement led by the Adivasis has the name of the Adivasis attached to it! This truth was not recognized even by any maha Marxists or maha revolutionaries–then who is Arundhati Roy?

Having worked in the left revolutionary movement, I am a living witness of the fact that no one recognized the Adivasi movements as Adivasi movements. A living witness.

Here, what I would like to make clear – the basis of the argument that Adivasi lands should remain with the Adivasis – the view that Komuram Bheem's struggle was an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, freedom movement is the view of the outsider. The realization that was brought about by the identity struggles was that every social group's struggles should be viewed from their own particular social perspectives.

Some men may look at women's issues sympathetically, that is different. But what does a man know of labour pains? How does anyone who inflicts untouchability on someone know of the humiliation relating to untouchability? How shall the rich man understand the pain of the poor? This is also similar.

It's not just Arundhati Roy, even the communist revolutionaries and the Marxists, who were more involved in their struggles, did not understand the Adivasis' problem. Here, I'd like to touch upon an issue that directly addresses this formulation. Among the non-Adivasis who fought to realize the objective of securing Adivasi lands for Adivasis alone, there were Dalits and backward class individuals. Does it mean that the Adivasi struggle was an anti-Dalit and anti-BC movement? Earlier, they had called it an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle, now if they say that even Dalits and BCs should not have any rights over Adivasi lands and it belongs exclusively to the Adivasis, then doesn't that make the Adivasi struggle an anti-Dalit, anti-BC and anti-poor movement? No. That is not how we should look at it.

The rights on forests should belong only to the Adivasis who live in the forests. Whoever violated that principle – whether it was BCs, or Dalits,

or contractors or capitalists or imperialists or even the Nizam nawab or his ancestors: the Adivasis opposed them. What is the central point of the tribal view? Tribal view is autonomy.

Only after acknowledging this, after accepting the Adivasi view that '*Jal Jangal Jameen hamara hai*', could the Naxalites go as far as Jangalmahal! Without accepting this principle they couldn't have gone as far as Jangalmahal. Am I right?

Only after the Maoists entered the Jangalmahal, could Arundhati Roy enter that mahal and write. Whose feet should both of them touch in gratitude? The concept of 'Adivasi lands for Adivasis alone', a concept signifying a movement for autonomy, was born out of the Adivasis' own struggle. Who was the leader of that struggle, what was his name? Was he a saint or a doctor? If we look at it from Dr Ambedkar's perspective, you'll see the saint there and the paint that you used (to cover the truth) will also vanish.

Please forgive me because I am speaking from a feeling of anguish and anger too.

During the nationalist movement, there were days when Gandhi and Ambedkar were placed on an equal footing. That context was different. From the stage when they said with disapproval that Ambedkar questioned even Gandhi, the father of the nation, they took him to the stage of the architect of the constitution and now they've arrived at the stage when everyone places Gandhi's and Ambedkar's pictures beside each other.

But during those times, all those who wrote on philosophical history, or Indian history, or political theories, or reform movements – most of those who wrote them were Brahmins. 99.99% of them. Is there any evidence that they had directly referred to Ambedkar's name even in a single book of theirs? Does not even a single insight of Ambedkar's merit a mention in any of the books written by any historian from among them? Please search and check. You won't find a single reference anywhere. If there is any mention it would only be to discredit his views.

After independence, when the identity movements, the Dalit and caste assertion movements, the democratic movements and other social movements emerged from this soil - all these identity struggles needed a philosopher. Who was that philosopher? It was Ambedkar.

In this way, the nationalist movement's history, the women's movement's history, the regional movements' history, the Adivasi struggles' history, Jharkhand's history, Chhattisgarh's history – all this is the history of the marginalized. These marginalized peoples, until they clenched their fists and tore open the earth to emerge on their own – there was no one to write even on Ambedkar, who had written on these peoples, no one to write on him! To appropriate even the truths these marginalized peoples brought into light as their own knowledge – doesn't that amount to pushing us into darkness? That's our anguish.

Yes, this is our reaction. I had said earlier, Ambedkar was given the Bharat Ratna in 1990. That year was also the 'year of social justice'. Phule's 100th death anniversary fell in 1990, and Ambedkar's 100th birth anniversary was in 1991. The Maharashtra government held both these events together.

On this occasion, the name of Union Ministry of Social Welfare was changed to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Please observe their timing – what they do at what stage. This historical context when the emerging alternative social struggles of the marginalized, oppressed castes look towards Ambedkar as a teacher, philosopher, a Buddha, a prophet– this (project) is an attempt to fold his index finger that guides them, and open his little finger (turning him into someone who needs guidance himself).

Yes. In this context, all those who tried to hide or erase Ambedkar until now, have now adopted a new strategy. You know, there's a magazine – run by one Ramana Murthy, a Brahmin contractor. Even a Brahmin contractor also poses a danger. Yes, the magazine is called *Vijaya Viharam*. He killed his employer and buried him in the kitchen of his house, covering it up with concrete. I didn't know the murder was so gruesome – I knew both, the victim and the murderer.

Well, what that *Vijaya Viharam* team tried to do was to equate Lohia, Gandhi and Ambedkar. If someone objected, they would go to the extent of saying Gandhi was bigger than Ambedkar.

Look at the change in positions: when it became virtually impossible to ignore Ambedkar, those who had until then tried to ignore or erase him gave him the Bharat Ratna. The same people equate him with Gandhi now. I ask, just for argument's sake, why didn't they show Ambedkar as equal to Gandhi earlier? They're unequal, but why didn't they at least attempt to show them as equals earlier? Now you equate them because the 'Mahatma' has shrunk to the size of a dwarf and Ambedkar whom you had tried to reduce in importance has risen to the stature of a giant? Because if Gandhi isn't allowed a little space beside Ambedkar now, no new statues of Gandhi will find any place on their own.

Now Ambedkar's statues painted in bright colours have appeared in every wada, village and town, in thousands and lakhs. Gandhi's statues which were installed long ago remain poorly maintained, sometimes with broken spectacles or sticks, covered in bird droppings, with no one to care for them. Why has this situation arisen? Because what Ambedkar had spoken then has been proven to be historical truth now.

What has been proven? He had said that it was not possible to eradicate untouchability leaving the caste system, which evolved from the *varna vyavastha*, untouched (Arundhati Roy too calls Gandhi a status quoist). Ambedkar had said, you can't eradicate it separately because untouchability is an extension of the caste system, so if you wish to eradicate untouchability you've to annihilate caste too. It isn't enough to ostentatiously label your efforts as (directed towards) caste eradication, because unless the Hindu religion, which has Brahminism or the caste system as its soul, is destroyed, brick by brick, and uprooted totally, caste can't be annihilated. So he had said it is not possible to eradicate untouchability and thereby liberate the Dalits without touching the caste system.

That has been later proved by Karamchedu – I don't need to go into more details. When Karamchedu had proven Ambedkar right, what

we had written in "*Nalupu*"[10] and our other magazines was that post-independence history had proven that Gandhism had failed and Ambedkarism had succeeded. That is what we had written, and I am talking about that now because I remember that history.

This is the first point. Therefore, post-independence history had clearly shown that there was no need to compare Ambedkar with Gandhi. It had conclusively set aside that debate. What we need to think about now is: Gandhi's harijan-vaad is dead, Ambedkar's philosophical theoretical alternative is now emerging as the foundation of the new social movements.

Now, in this LPG age, when there is a need to think about how to take it (the Ambedkarite movement) forward, on how to apply Ambedkar's philosophical theoretical alternative for the 21st century, what they're trying to do is to revive the failed Gandhivaad, to stop progress in the direction of Ambedkar's index finger and drag us back to Gandhi.

If we think about the background of this attempt, we know Ranganayakamma and Arun Shourie faced intense opposition. It is not a coincidence that both of them belong to upper castes and upper varnas. Even this (Arundhati Roy episode) is because of caste. But the lesson they've learnt is that they're distancing themselves from the Dalits through their negative attitude. They thought of finding someone from their own community who could attract Dalits, and who enjoyed a wide reputation across India and internationally as a writer and make her write a book so that they could talk of having someone who served the role of a liberal brahminical democrat, at least. They thought if they didn't attempt this they wouldn't have any future to speak of.

Even though Arundhati Roy had earned a certain respect earlier by talking about the Adivasi movement, the Dalit movement and the women's movement – even though all those movements were led by the Adivasis, the Dalits and the women activists themselves respectively - she finally got caught when she attempted to talk of caste.

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10 *Nalupu*: Telugu Dalit fortnightly magazine started in the 1980s by K.G. Satyamurthy (Sivasagar), Kancha Ilaiah, Bojja Tharakam and U. Sambashiva Rao, among others.

Therefore, the need for the upper castes to disprove Ambedkar's theory that the 'pope himself could become a revolutionary but not the Brahmin' still lies with them. This book instead of attempting to disprove that theory appears as a brahminical strategy once again. We condemn this strategy in strong terms.

Translated from Telugu by **Naren Bedide.**

The Brahmean Machine: Distorting Revolt into Surrender

~ Shakyamuni

A veritable danger lurks over the entire corpus of knowledge and practices developed as a result of Dalit existence, assertion and its resistance to Brahminism. In short, the entire Dalit episteme: from the teachings of Buddha, Ajiwakas, Siddhas, Naths, Bauls, south Indian revolutionaries like Akka Mahadevi, Basavanna, Chenna Basavanna, Kinnari Bommayya, Siddharama, Allama Prabhu and Dasimayya (all incorrectly christened as Bhaktas) to Kabir, Nanak, Bulle Shah among many others. And this threat is directed at their histories too. Such appropriation however is not new. It has been a common feature throughout history. Only the methods that are deployed find novel ways (most recently novelists' ways too).

The AA Battery

The machine of such blatant appropriation has recently been energized and powered by a certain double A battery (AA – Arundhati Roy and Anand Iyengar) of Brahmeans (according to me the right nomenclature for a Brahmin, signifying a key Brahmanic quality, meanness, which according to Dr Ambedkar as stated in *AoC*, 'is worse than cruelty'). With their latest joint venture of bringing out 'A Critical and Annotated Edition' of Babasaheb's '*Annihilation of Caste*', they carry forward the age-old tradition of Brahmins exploiting Dalit labour and culture.

It was the same machine that rendered Kabir toothless in the past. The act started with the very categorisation of what Kabir's life and words meant: what should have been called a revolt was wrongly and cunningly termed as *Bhakti* i.e. surrender. Kabir was mutilated by a Hindi-chauvinist Brahmin organisation called *Kashi Nagari Pracharini sabha*, which was formed for Brahminising Hindi – interpolating it with, and "purifying" it, by sprinkling the *Gangajal* called Sanskrit on it. This happened in the 1890s under the leadership of a Punjabi Khatri, Babu Shyam Sundar Das, and a reactionary Brahmin, Ramchandra Shukla. To see how far their appropriation and distortion was institutionalized one must consider the fact that the Hindi-English Dictionary edited by the duo is accepted as

standard and authoritative by Government of India and the American universities.[11]

This sort of usurpation goes hand in hand with the stifling of alternative meanings and hence makes any other interpretations (other than the appropriated versions) impossible. In the above mentioned case, for example, Dalit Hindi, originally known as *Ahiri Bhasha* was a language that found voice among the lower caste viz. *Ahirs* . Other versions of Hindi were subjected to the same processes or erased altogether. In a similar manner, the canonization and distortion of Kabir (the mutilated Kabir) disallowed any alternative reading. Like how they substituted '*sunna*' and '*shabda*' with 'Rama' in the renditions of Kabir. This has been pointed out by Sadafal Guru, a Saint belonging to the Kabiric tradition, in his book *Swarwed*.[12]

The introduction of 'Rama', a strong and problematic Hindu symbol, into this tradition was very dangerous. This was tantamount to Brahminisation of Kabir. Furthermore, the very tradition of Sadafal Guru has been appropriated by his son and a certain Swantantra Dev ji Maharaj who organised *hawanas* and chanting of Vedas in the name of Kabir. How shocking to know that Kabir who was vehemently against Vedas and their nasty teachings was made a vehicle for propagating Vedic *Karmakanda* (rituals)! The Kabir Project of Linda Hess is also a product of the same ugly machine of appropriation. They all want to reduce Kabir to meaningless metaphysics.

The mutilated Kabir edited by the Punjabi Khatri, Babu Shyam Sundar Das, is prescribed in the syllabus of Hindi Literature in Civil Services exams conducted by UPSC. These are some of the clever tactics through which Brahmins inflict and maintain hegemony over entire knowledge systems and how the monopoly of 'revised' Brahminised texts continues to be enforced. Would this also be the fate of Babasaheb's *AoC* as already pointed out in an earlier essay titled "The New Harijan Sewak Sangh" by James Michael and Akshay Pathak?

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11 Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/dasa-hindi/ (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

12 Guru, Sadafal. Swarwed. Published by *Swatantraji Maharaj*, Gangatat, Prayaag, 2011.

Taking further the example of Kabir, we must bear in mind that he was a revolutionary poet. The tampering and appropriation of his works transformed him into a spineless mystic: a *Bhakta* (devotee). The Brahminist forces falsely reduced him to someone contemplating vacuous and obtuse rubbish on *Brahma*. The social resistance and struggle offered by the poet-revolutionary was erased from the collective memory of his caste peers and it subsequently disappeared even from the narratives of Dalit history.

This is a harsh reality to face because when we, lower castes, try to reconstruct our own splintered history, our sources are often those managed, controlled and distorted by the Brahmins. Other sources of history are deliberately erased. They make it impossible to reclaim Dalit history by creating a certain mythology around the Dalit personality. A total closure of history is effected by them through this mythologizing and 'fixation' of meaning. Text is no more the infinite play of meaning in the Brahminised world. Apart from that they play around with the narrative too. For example, they made a prince out of Buddha who was otherwise a citizen of the republic of Shakyas. Just as they made Kabir the illicit son of a Brahmin "saint" (not doctor?) Ramananda while in fact Kabir was the son of lower caste parents – Niru and Nima.

The Machine of Hypocrisy

True to their hegemonizing and controlling tactics they continue the shameless use of this machine with renewed force and vigour well into the 21st century. And they do it under the garb of being 'progressive', 'liberal', or standing for 'freedom of expression' and other such dubious devices. The battery's evil motives of appropriating the Dalit movement is typically Gandhian in theme as illustrated by several others in the various articles on *Round Table India*.

In this connection, it is not misplaced to recall the hypocrisy of the arrogant Arundhati Roy (hereafter referred to as AR). She declined the offer to make her debut (and only) novel – *The God Of Small Things* – into a film citing her reservations against the danger of 'fixing' the meaning etc., in the cinematic interpretation of the story. The same AR, however, is ruthless and adamant about 'fixing' the meanings of *AoC* through the

so-called critical 'annotations' and creating a hyper-reality by mapping *AoC* into a preface longer than the book itself.

It is like making a map of Puducherry[13] which is bigger in area than Puducherry itself. One would wonder how is that a problem? First of all, this map which involves magnifying the text and its meanings is 'justified' by them under the dubious pretext of making it 'visible' (touchable? cf. commentary named 'Touchable Tales' by Navayana) to the elite Hindu-Brahmin and white audiences. But actually this misdemeanour not only reduces *AoC* but also severely disfigures it, destroys its totality.

In fact, it litters *AoC* with the meaningless clutter of metaphysical pixels in the form of obnoxious Arundhatian observations. You are lost in the map if you are not a Brahmin. The map becomes more 'real' than Puducherry. Thus, it puts the real Puducherry in abeyance and imposes a hyper-real Baudrillardian map in its place. Noteworthy is also the timing of such an act (as pointed out by U. Sambashiva Rao in his intervention titled "A tactical, brahminical trick", also featured in this book) since it seeks to mutilate both space and time, that is, both the Dalit identity and history.

It is a typical Brahminist project vis-à-vis the 'project of silences' which she mentions repeatedly in her preface. One must actually call it a 'de-face' – a defacing of Babasaheb and his politics. She attempts to render Babasaheb inaudible not by silencing him or through what she calls the 'project of silence' but through drowning it in a deliberate and harmful cacophony – the cacophony of a 180 page 'de-face'.

The Ghost of Capitalism

AR deforms Babasaheb in brutal and different ways - a practice seen to be a favourite sport of the savarnas as evidenced by the plight of many statues of his. Her strategy is multi-pronged. On the one hand she commodifies

13 Puducherry is a small city and union territory which was colonized by the French in the past. The notion of hyper-reality is attributed to Jean Baudrillard, a French thinker. The choice of Puducherry as an illustration is a conscious one considering similarities between the power techniques of the French and the Brahmins. They achieve the best economy of power and ensure political exclusion by social inclusion and vice versa and do not accord both at a given time. They suppress by exclusion contrary to British who adopt inclusive methods of regimentation or colonisation to be more precise. Therefore, French colonies are not colonies in the true sense of the word: they are appropriations.

Dalit resistance (she has a habit of commodifying other resistances too, viz. Adivasi resistance). On the other hand, she greedily strives to occupy the space where Dalit resistance is situated, thus denying Dalits any room to articulate their struggle against Brahminism. Her strategy is aimed at controlling Dalit resistance and in this controlling to contain it. She reincarnates herself as a Gandhi.

She makes some Dalits into her 'small things' – things of study, things of pity, things of examination, things of critical scrutiny, things of defence, things of Gandhism. She seeks to be a Delphi Goddess of 'small things' for plebeians along with patricians who awarded her their Booker. One is compelled to refer here to Babasaheb mentioning the Goddess of Delphi in *AoC* to gauge what this Goddess means for Brahmins/patricians and to see how crucial she is to the reinforcement and perpetuation of Brahminism.

The two-faced colonizer

At another level she behaves like a two-faced colonizer. One is a regular colonizer who has to conquer land and nature, much like Robinson Crusoe. She is also the 'orientalist' colonizer out there on its modernist project of a 'will to know' and in such knowing to mythify the colonized and shut its mouth. Which is followed by the ludicrous and insulting question in postmodern Brahmin-ese spoken through its Gayatri Spivak avatar – "Can the subaltern speak?"

AR assumes both these roles of the colonizer. Dalit intellectual space is the territory – Puducherry– which she seeks to colonize. A colony, as one knows, is considered to be a source of raw materials as well as a market for finished goods. For the imperialist machine powered by the AA battery, *AoC* is envisaged as raw material which needs to be processed and is in constant want of 'refinement'. The finished product is the 'annotated' (read mutilated: now it has become what it is not, in Fanonian terms) *AoC* to be consumed by a new middle class of small castes and the big middle class of big castes. And of course finished goods prepared from the colony are exported too as we might eventually witness.

The Focauldian 'other Gandhi'

This bid for appropriation of Ambedkar is further development of similar projects (though failed ones) by the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal and Gandhi. What was left unfinished by Gandhi is carried forward by the AA battery through certain advanced mechanisms. AR is in fact a modernised Gandhi. She is modern, and hence revels in this display of a love-hate relationship with Gandhi. Much like Nehru who, as we are made to believe, was allegedly modern. Therefore, any person who wants to further the cause of Gandhi, which is, to produce and reproduce Brahminism to oppress smaller castes, is bound to enter into such a covalent relationship with Gandhi. AR is no exception.

The production and reproduction of Brahminism is a crucial and much needed area to be explored, exposed and demolished. This essay of mine is just a small attempt to point towards that direction. By production of Brahminism, I mean its development, sustenance, reproduction and perpetuation. Despite the false claims around cultural studies, the production in the culture industry in India, which is usurped and managed by the Brahmin, has been left unanalysed. One sees this even in the manner they have dubbed any Dalit resistance including the one to the AA project as *identity politics*, while they cleverly refuse to see any identity politics in how the savarnas hold on to their positions of power in media, academia, publishing etc.

Not only is the Brahmin politics made clandestine by dint of this hegemony over knowledge but the very Brahmin hegemony over production and reproduction of knowledge and knowledge systems is intentionally obscured. I draw on the notion developed by Louis Althusser and Walter Benjamin and their suitable adaptation to the Indian context to bring about a clear perspective of the inner weavings of hegemonic relations within and without Brahminism.

When AR assumes the role of Gandhi in oppressing the Dalit episteme, it is part of the same reproduction of Brahminism. When this role is expanded and consolidated by Dalit-Bahujan collaborators, I call it production. Thus, production and reproduction are bound in dialectical unity. Production introduces new elements into Brahminism and reproduction perpetuates

it. Brahminism is produced through agents but reproduced through Brahmins themselves. Reproducers choose production agents from the oppressed community itself. They are vectors of Brahminism. The anti-Brahminism struggle is conveniently targeted against these agents - the producers of Brahminism, and ends up being successful. So, Brahminism continues to thrive because the reproducers are not challenged and targeted in this struggle. Babasaheb's unique contribution to the caste struggle was targeting the reproducers, that is, the Brahmins.

The Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal and Gandhi realised this and so they vehemently opposed him. So much so that the former published Babasaheb's reply and the write-up without his permission. Gandhi ridiculed Babasaheb and recognised him as his real enemy. He mentioned tauntingly that Babasaheb had wanted "not to be forgotten". We, from lower castes, understand full well what the exact intention of Babasaheb was and what he wanted. And indeed, we want him never to be forgotten, never to be erased from history, not to be mutilated, 'de-faced', mythified, reified or roy-fied.

AR as a Brahmin is the current leader of this project of appropriation of Dr Ambedkar. She, as explained above, is reproducing and perpetuating Brahminism. This act has already been challenged and will have to be demolished. Paulo Freire envisaged history as possibility. But history can be thought of as impossibility too. Make this history of repeated appropriation impossible. Mythify the myth. Erase AR from Dalit history. Stop the reproduction of the 'other' Gandhi into ARs. To conclude I find this couplet from Kabir Saheb quite fitting:

> *Ham na marihaun, marihe samsara*
>
> [I will not vanish; this world (of Brahmin) will be annihilated instead].

Why strangulate the essence of Babasaheb Ambedkar's *AoC*?

~ Dr Sangeeta Pawar

(Dr Sangeeta Pawar's speech at the **'The Colonization of Ambedkar: Caste Politics behind Roy-Navayana's Appropriation of Annihilation of Caste ~ A Discussion'** *held on 21 December, 2014, at University of Mumbai)*

Respected chief guest of this session, Suresh Mane sir, Kuffir sir, Anoopji, James Michael, other organizers of this deliberation and my dear participant friends,

I want to begin with the introductory aspects connected with the book. The minute this book came to my hand, I began with the first page and immediately I was tempted to go to the last part, which is the acknowledgments page. The fact is, why I had to jump directly to the acknowledgements page is to know actually what references the author has given, who have helped her in her endeavour, whether any Dalit writers have helped her and how well read the author is.

She states in the book that 'revolutions have begun with reading'. Is she justified in making that statement? I ask that, because if you want to talk about a writer, and want to preface his/her text that has already been published – and that too when you dare to touch Babasaheb Ambedkar's '*Annihilation of Caste*' – then you cannot justify it unless you've read it well enough.

The book begins with all kinds of misleading quotations and observations. Let me be very precise with you. When I went through it, right from the first part through the 150 pages of the introduction, the thought that haunted my mind and would occur to every other reader's mind irrespective of the role one plays as a civilian, professional, academician or an activist is, 'why does *Annihilation of Caste*, one of Babasaheb Ambedkar's greatest works, require a reintroduction?' And when there has to be a reintroduction, why should it be a debatable kind of a reintroduction wherein you're trying

to prove that Gandhi was a saint and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was only a Dalit hero?

The pyramid of caste and caste hierarchy, with the caste at bottom as polluters and the caste at the top signifying purity – how should this narrative be seen? Does this narrative not invite caste hatred from the upper caste people towards the marginalised and downtrodden sections of society? The author embraces wrong ideas about annihilation of caste and is distorting Babasaheb Ambedkar's perceptions about it. This shows deep insensitivity towards the Dalit community.

As a reader, I fail to understand why did she begin with Malala's fight for peace, justice and the right of the girl child for education, connecting it with a story about Surekha Bhotmange (the Khairlanji murders). She further says, *if you've heard of Malala and you've not heard of Surekha Bhotmange, then you have to read Babasaheb Ambedkar*!

From there, the book goes on talking about caste, the problems associated with castes in India, how the hierarchy begins and then she tries to corroborate these contentions, and moves into a different territory. Now she comes to the *Baniyas*, the *Vaishyas*, and then to the corporate sector, reeling out statistical figures about what are the types of discriminations happening in India, and then talks back-to-back about colonization, imperialism, racism, casteism etc. She touches upon too many aspects that leave the reader baffled! If your plate is heaped up with too many dishes, you can rarely have a pleasant experience. You don't know where to start eating! And if you instead begin with trying a little of everything, then you're not satisfied with any of the dishes. Such is the experience that one has after reading the book.

A reader gains satisfaction from a viewpoint or an idea that he or she agrees with in a book and then develops a loyalty towards the author. As an Ambedkarite, I would always have that kind of loyalty towards Babasaheb's original '*Annihilation of Caste*', and I don't get the same interest from what Arundhati Roy is trying to bring before the readership.

My humble submission is that if you hide the name of the author, and ask somebody to give an exact review of this introduction, then I guess it will be a critical appraisal.

The upper caste run political and social system tries to project the view that caste as a factor of discrimination, atrocities, injustice, inequality has little or no significance in India, whereas there are several cases of atrocities, honour killings occuring every other day across the whole country. There is a statement in the book which says that democracy itself has not removed caste, which seems to satisfy the author in some way.

The contradictions in the book if read, analysed and understood thoroughly, leave one baffled, without giving one a complete picture.

I also wish to ask: whether the book has any relevance or not? If the relevance of a book is in terms of its appeal and orientation, I find that for me, this book has zero relevance. Why would you buy a book that has a feeling of theatricality, but no intellectual relevance? Why strangulate the essence of Babasaheb Ambedkar's original text? Why mislead the audience? Why adopt a narrower approach that dilutes the originality of the text?

How do you really go about justifying this book? If you intend to justify the book, there are certain things which I find objectionable as a reader. The author is feeding the modern society and upper caste readers with the plight of the downtrodden, about the stigma of caste attached to them, how they are educationally not developed, about discriminations. Why is she infusing a feeling of hatred, rejection towards Dalit community by being vociferous about their problems and trying to create a charade of social sympathy? Gone are the days when the Dalit community had to look in every direction to gain this kind of support and sympathy. This community has now come to think more broadly and from the point of view of its own and others' social obligations.

One more objectionable comment she had made was during a talk at Teacher's College, Columbia University, in the US (video is available on YouTube). Addressing the western audience, she says that Babasaheb Ambedkar has helped in the drafting of the constitution, whereas the

whole world already glorifies Ambedkar as the father of the Indian constitution. Despite his health issues, he had singlehandedly started the process of constitution making and took it to completion. She gives very little space to Babasaheb in her speech while talking about Gandhi in a glorious manner.

Now my dear friends, it's not as if I need to read only Ambedkar and talk about *AoC*, and not read Gandhi because I am an Ambedkarite. We all are well read people, we have read Gandhi several times, we have read Ambedkar several times. We are mature enough to understand what the debate between these two people was, and after that, if we still choose to follow Babasaheb Ambedkar, it is because we understand the need to address the casteist forces that are hindering our development.

So from that perspective, I personally feel that the book does not actually justify the overall theme of '*Annihilation of Caste*'. The title ('The Doctor and the Saint') itself is objectionable. So the objectionable parts – the title, the introduction – should not be accepted as *Annihilation of Caste*. Next, I would say, as an academician, the part where she talks about the debate that took place between Gandhi and Ambedkar feels superficial as she has failed to interlink the objectionable aspects of Gandhi's perceptions about caste and Babasaheb Ambedkar's argument about Gandhi's casteism.

I personally feel she could have been bolder and done some good referencing and allowed equal space to both of them. Like if somebody who is not an Ambedkarite, and who always believes in Gandhi, reads this introduction, he will accept all viewpoints of the author without even getting to know the other side of the story. One should engage from the point of understanding these two personalities together, and if that is done, objectively, Babasaheb Ambedkar's views on every aspect of Indian society will occupy larger space. This book fails to provide that space.

I am sympathizing with Arundhati Roy – she should have taken a little more care, because her name matters. In fact, if we consider this write-up on *AoC*, we cannot say that she is a great icon, despite her success with the *The God of Small Things*.

When it comes to this particular book, she has failed to give a proper introduction.

Insurgency Tourism and Simplistic Modernism

~ K K Baburaj

This article first appeared in the online Malayalam portal Utharakalam *on April 23, 2014.*

Although some of the questions raised by a few Hyderabad based Dalit students on Arundhati Roy's introduction to *Annihilation of Caste* could create some misunderstandings around the issue of representation, it is unfair to think that the students were pitching for casteism. On the contrary, I think they recognized it as an important moment for intervention.

No one has said that Arundhati Roy cannot criticize Ambedkar or touch *Annihilation of Caste* because she is from an upper caste. This is false propaganda generated by *The Hindu* newspaper. The purpose of this endless propaganda is to deflect attention from the ideological and institutional violence by the upper castes and portray the resistance of subalterns as criminal. In this regard, it is pertinent to recollect the controversy around Kamal Haasan's movie *Vishwaroopam*.[14] The violence against Muslims in that movie was drowned in the clamour for 'freedom of expression'. At the same time, the protests of Islamic organisations and intellectuals against the movie were dismissed as emotional outbursts of the uncivilised.

It becomes clear then that only when celebrity or public figures get criticized by subalterns, does public consciousness ready itself to produce apologias about them being victims. It was not only Dalits who criticized Arundhati Roy during the *AoC* debates, upper castes, Muslim, and Christian intellectuals also criticised her. However, it is worth considering why some *mortuary Marxists* and pseudo liberals came forward only to blame Dalits in this regard.

14 Vishwaroopam is a 2013 Tamil spy thriller film written, directed and co-produced by Kamal Haasan.

A few years back, the Malayalam magazine *'Pachakuthira'* had published an issue on Ambedkar centred on the Gandhi-Ambedkar controversy. During that time, I had criticized such thematic representations. Ambedkar emerged as a different presence from Gandhi and Nehru because of the change in political landscape brought about by new social agencies. To revolve around the Gandhi-Ambedkar axis without confronting the aforementioned reality is the limitation of the simplistic modernism harboured by people such as Arundhati.

The flip side of this modernism is the erasure of several subaltern representations and dialogic spaces of engagement. It is therefore not surprising that Dalit intellectual engagements that recognize such erasures render suspect the credibility of people such as Arundhati Roy. In short, criticisms have been levelled against her not because she is an upper caste individual, but because she practises simple modernity, among other things.

Navayana cancelled a book agreement with Joe D'Cruz for praising Narendra Modi but inked a deal with Ms Roy who wrote a full-fledged literary piece romanticising Maoist laboratories which are instrumental in the continuing mass murder of Dalit, Adivasi people in various parts of India. Navayana revealed its double face through this double deal. They forget that like the violence of Hindutva, the counter-violence of feudal Maoist establishments also destabilises democracy and pluralism.

I feel that it is a reflection of Arundhati Roy's own conservative understanding and egotism that pushes her to take excessive interest in Maoism and celebrate it. In any case, this controversy brings out the contradictions of *AoC* being introduced by an individual who celebrates such counter-violence and whose challenge to the state is based on her own egotism.

In fact, for the Bahujans, Arundhati Roy cuts the image of a tourist who romanticises Maoist propaganda viz. *Indian society is corporate-dominated, people's movements and Bahujan struggles need a change in direction due to the repressive characteristics of the state, justice is impossible for the poor because bureaucracy and legal system are controlled by the rich, the constitution is responsible for the deracination*

of Adivasis etc. Putting aside the factual accuracy of these statements, let's look at what the Maoists and the Communist party offer. The former offers a panacea in the form of the theory of class struggle and the latter an all-encompassing subjectivity. Roy draws a straight line between these two to reach towards a politico-military revolution.

It is important to remember that at a time when Marxism was at its peak, Ambedkar rejected the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat (he did not disagree with all strands of socialist thinking.) It was at the time when Maoists were coming up with their new ideologies and action plans for democratic revolution that Dalit movements and leaders such as Kanshi Ram were also becoming politically active (Dalit politics have often expressed unity with CPI–ML's Bahujan political tendencies). The critical difference here is that the theme of the politics of the marginalized is 'survival', while a Marxist agenda is determined by 'class struggle'. It is because Marxism was unable to comprehend the 'survival' aspect of subaltern politics that in places where 'revolutions' took place, such as Telangana and Naxalbari, Dalits and other marginalized communities found themselves further marginalized.

The current scenario in Central India proves that contemporary Maoism leaves these segments of the population not just groundless, but also pushes them to commit fratricide and self-destructive mass murders. In short, a political and military revolution that is arrived at by drawing a straight line from Marxism will not consider marginalised sections or other religio-socio diversities, or sexual minorities, as political agents.

In this sense, without making an in-depth enquiry into why Ambedkar rejected the theory of class struggle, thought differently about governmentality, wrote about capital and central-regional state administration, and tried to understand changes to the caste system, Arundhati Roy has through the medium of *AoC* intervened to glorify Maoism. It is clear that it is this aspect that has led to widespread criticisms against her.

Finally, it is true that people like Arundhati Roy do challenge the state, oppose corporate rule, and are sympathetic toward alternative social movements. But to assume, therefore, that she representatively includes

Bahujan women, backward sections and other minorities is a work of over-imagination. To be beyond the state, to detest urbanism, to understand class domination ahistorically, to fail to recognize emerging social subjectivities, and above all, to have no trust in democracy—are not these merely the natural convictions arising from her belief in a simplistic modernism?

Translated from Malayalam by **Gee Imaan Semmalar**.

Does Arundhati have any other qualification than her stardom?

~ Sunny Kapicadu interviewed by Dr O. K. Santhosh

This interview appeared first in the online Malayalam portal Utharakalam *on April 17, 2014*

Dr O. K. Santhosh: Arundhati Roy's long introduction to *Annihilation of Caste* (*AoC*) has generated much debate, particularly in the cyber and print media. Are these debates something more than mere controversies generated to bring attention to the Navayana edition? Since Roy's right to write an introduction to Ambedkar's most important work has been questioned, I think an explanation in this regard is necessary.

Sunny Kapicadu: The argument that only people with Dalit identity can talk about Ambedkar is fundamentally wrong. I think anybody can talk about Ambedkar. However, at the same time, it should be agreed that others have the freedom to analyze what is being written and spoken. Arundhati can write an introduction not only because Ambedkar has spoken about Buddhists and Sikhs (cf. "Arundhati replies to Dalit Camera", also featured in this book), she can write it otherwise as well. Ambedkar was the centre of discussions during and after the period of the nationalist movement. So if Arundhati has an opinion about Ambedkar, questions regarding whether she is a Dalit or has any sympathy for Dalits are not cardinal.

The issue is that *AoC* was an undelivered speech written in 1936 for Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. Later, Ambedkar published it himself. Now, almost 80 years later, at this juncture, this book is coming out with an introduction. The important question is whether this introduction is for Ambedkar or for *AoC*. Two things could be considered important with regard to Arundhati writing an introduction. How did she suddenly get the right to write this introduction? It is clear that Anand, owner of Navayana, had recognised Arundhati's stardom. Other than that, one cannot see any other right. I would support Arundhati, if she were to ask whether people in the limelight cannot have an opinion. She can say that. However,

even if she agrees with this or not, one of the things that people think is that she has an image as an intellectual writer with substantial and uncompromising opinions. This image is the basis of her stardom. So, when she hinges on that image to write about Ambedkar, the reality is that readers would tend to consider it as trustworthy.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: Isn't it reductive to argue that it's the stardom of Arundhati that is fuelling the current debates? Isn't the presence of a Dalit discourse, developed through Ambedkar's writings, that is problematising the issue?

Sunny Kapicadu: Stardom is going to influence her readers deeply. That's why I said that an intense scrutiny is necessary. Otherwise, Anand would have to respond to questions regarding whether Arundhati has any qualification other than her stardom. As somebody who has read Arundhati and has an idea about her sensibility, I do not think she has any other right to talk about Ambedkar than this.

Another issue is with regard to the speculations around the publication of this book. Arundhati announced that she is cancelling the book release function in Hyderabad because there was this possibility of Dalit writers and activists disrupting the program. She has yet to reveal the source of these speculations. It was S. Anand who informed the media about this (cf. "Introducing Arundhati Roy and friends" by Karthik Navayan, also featured in this book). What we should understand from such controversies is that they think that the Dalit intelligentsia has fallen to the level of physically confronting intellectual challenges raised against Ambedkarism.

In reality there is a Dalit intellectual terrain that is capable of confronting such challenges in India. Arundhati has to hang on to stories of violence precisely because she is unable to understand this. Questions that are being discussed now were raised because she has not been maintaining the requisite decency required for dealing with this issue. *AoC*, which was published in 1936, is one of the most read books of Ambedkar in India. The book, which was available for 8 *anna* then, has been translated into multiple languages and debated. *AoC* has inspired the formation of many large-scale social institutions and strong Dalit movements in India.

It is important to ask whether Arundhati has understood that this book has had a history of its own. If this aspect is not being seen, there is no point in rejecting the criticisms raised against her. Can somebody of Arundhati's standing claim that she is oblivious to all of this? The fact that she doesn't mention anywhere in her introduction that unlike Ambedkar's other writings *AoC* has had a different history pushes us to think that she maintains a low opinion on this.

During times when publishers like Navayana were not around, people who were inspired by *AoC* translated it into their own languages and distributed it. That is the historical importance of this work.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: BSP leader Kanshi Ram has said that *AoC* was the book that influenced him the most.

Sunny Kapicadu: I think I will come to that later. One of the shortcomings of Arundhati Roy's introduction is that it is ignorant of the anti-caste crusades that have been initiated by Dalits. If she had any knowledge in this regard, she would have pointed out the importance of *AoC*. She has not done that. This is the most crucial point discussed by Ambedkar. In *AoC*, Ambedkar asks why is it that India's savarnas, or the Brahminical system, instead of confronting caste, are posing obstacles to activities aimed at annihilating caste?

Dr O. K Santhosh: In this context, one could highlight what KP Ramanunni[15]had written in the foreword to the novel *Chavuthullal* (2011) written by Raju K Vasu.[16] He had written that Ambedkar had led many agitations in Thiruvananthapuram. Should one interrogate the contradiction that Dalits are approaching writers who are clueless of history for getting forewords written for their books?

Sunny Kapicadu: Raju K Vasu looks at Ramanunni as a Malayalam writer with star value. Therefore, he believes that Ramanunni's introduction would help his book. However, Ramanunni's ignorance about Ambedkar is in reality a part of the ignorance of savarnas about their living conditions and caste. Arundhati's ignorance is because of her lack of awareness of

15 K. P. Ramanunni is a novelist and short-story writer from Kerala.

16 Raju K Vasu is a Dalit novelist from Kerala.

caste. The question as to whether this foreword was written only for *AoC* is important. If that were the case, she should have examined Ambedkar's description of the operation of caste in Indian society and its social effects.

In the end, when he confronts the question of how to annihilate caste, Ambedkar concludes that it is quite difficult to eradicate caste. He says that as long as Brahmins maintain their intellectual dominance, these difficulties would not end. He points this as one of the important reasons why caste cannot be eradicated. So if Arundhati is writing a foreword to a book which deals with issues such as this, we expect new interpretations about caste and observations that matter to the present. However, this foreword does not do that but ends up doing certain other things.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: When the Manorama-Penguin combine published Gail Omvedt's book on Ambedkar in Malayalam, KK Kochu, one of the front ranking Malayali intellectuals, was assigned to write an introduction. Wasn't Navayana also trying out such a possibility through Arundhati?

Sunny Kapicadu: It was S. Anand's decision to republish the book and get Arundhati to write a foreword to the book. Annotations were prepared by Anand himself. Our discussion is about the aftereffects of these attempts made by Anand. A huge body of scholarship exists on Ambedkar and his writings. The greatest drawback is that the book chooses not to see this. Even if Anand did not see it, Arundhati should have seen it. This is because Anand might have had many commercial interests. If Arundhati writes a foreword, the book would sell internationally. Although he prefers to call himself as an anti-caste publisher, a publication always has a profit end to it.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: You are an acquaintance of Anand. Have you felt Anand has had such interests?

Sunny Kapicadu: I do not think Anand is all about marketing strategy. A marketing expert just would not depend on an existing market, but would create a new one. Anand is a good marketing expert, and in that sense he cannot be faulted. But when that marketing expertise operates through Ambedkar, my interest is in analysing what happens to Ambedkar's ideas

and the social upheavals generated by those ideas, and not in saying that Anand should not have brought out the book.

Dr O. K Santhosh: Ambedkar centenary was celebrated in India in 1992. During this time Ambedkar's works were getting published widely in Maharashtra under the stewardship of Vasant Moon. In Malayalam too, as part of the project, the complete works of Ambedkar were being widely published and read. Does Arundhati's study discard the fact that these publishing efforts engendered a resurrection of Dalit consciousness?

Sunny Kapicadu: We cannot look at it like that. What happened after Maharashtra government's initiatives to publish the complete works of Ambedkar and publishing *AoC* with Arundhati Roy's introduction cannot be compared. The new book performs a totally different function.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: Even now you keep referring to it as 'Arundhati's book'. Isn't there the logic of stardom at work here?

Sunny Kapicadu: Not in the least. I have gone through the book, got it directly from Delhi for the purpose. One thing I have understood clearly is that this book is not about *AoC*. Arundhati's foreword is the focus area of the book, as reflected in its sales. I claim that this book is Arundhati's not because I am a fan of hers. I respect her as a writer, even as I am critical of her writings. Even if I am not personally close to her, I know her well. I neither worship nor harbour any enmity towards her.

From Ambedkar's first paper, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', presented in 1916, the introductory study goes through the speeches made by him in the constituent assembly. However, Gandhi-Ambedkar controversy remains the crux of the introduction. The arguments in the introduction revolve around that core. Arundhati claims that she needed to talk about Gandhi a lot because she had to explain why Ambedkar felt the need to enter into a conflict with a great man like Gandhi. However, I do not think it is as innocent as she puts it.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: Ambedkar has written that it is wrong to think that if Gandhi were to speak no dog would bark in India.

Sunny Kapicadu: Yes, that is right, Ambedkar has written likewise. After the publication of *AoC*, although there was a welter of criticism, Ambedkar's stance was that he would only respond to Gandhi, as Gandhi's utterances were considered authoritative. No dog would bark in front of that authority. Ambedkar wrote that it was this aspect that prompted him to respond to Gandhi. We opened this discussion by talking about why Arundhati's book was being criticized.

Due to her star power, there are readers who take her to be authentic. There is a mistake in that, and that's why we are discussing it here. As an Ambedkarite, one of the epochal moments in Indian history for me had been the period when Dalits started considering Ambedkar beyond the framework of the Ambedkar-Gandhi controversy. During that period, Dalits started taking qualitative steps forward. That was a historical moment in India. I consider myself an Ambedkarite only because as far as I am concerned the light shone by Ambedkar is quite important for India.

Dr O. K. Santhosh: Another aspect is that, after visiting Dandakaranya, Arundhati Roy had written a long article titled 'Walking with the Comrades'. I think, after that, her image as an independent writer suffered a setback. The ripple effects of that article were felt among the Dalit-Adivasi movements and independent thinkers in India. Could she have written the foreword to Ambedkar as part of a strategy to tide over this setback?

Sunny Kapicadu: I do not know if there was any such move from her part. One should understand that even in this foreword she mentions the 'great' activities Maoists are engaged in. That is to say, it is discussed that Ambedkar was unable to understand the problems of the Adivasis correctly and what happens in Central India now is a very important movement. What we should understand is that Ambedkar's constituency was that of Dalits, that of untouchables. He was not somebody who was involved in or led any Adivasi movements. But he has expressed many opinions on Adivasi issues.

Even Arundhati Roy expresses an opinion in this regard. It is about the issue of how other communities are not rooting for the progress of Adivasis. However, we should also be attentive to what Ambedkar is

saying. He observes that since Dalits are a fragmented group in India, there are obstacles to their progress, but since Adivasis are concentrated region-wise, there is a possibility of them making advances in the future. We should know that, even as there is Maoist presence in Central India, there are many strong political leaders and chief ministers from tribal communities in the region.

It is merely her romantic imagination which makes her claim that with the creation of the Indian Constitution, the lives of Adivasis were destroyed. The Constitution, among other things, opens up the possibilities of Adivasi self-governance. What is the point in blaming the Constitution, if the state lacks the will to put in motion the possibilities offered by it?

The British government hadn't invited any Adivasi representatives for the first, second, and third Round Table Conferences in India. However, three Dalit representatives attended these meetings. It was Ambedkar who confronted Gandhi during these meetings. When Arundhati argues that Gandhi was following Ambedkar's logic as part of this context, she employs a shrewdness that can never be justified.

Dr O. K Santhosh: So is Arundhati Roy bringing a disguised form of Maoism to Dalit politics via this foreword?

Sunny Kapicadu: I believe her methodology melds all these elements. That is to say, discuss about constitutional impasses, at the same time raise Adivasi issues, and refer to Maoist movements. In this fashion there is an attempt to bring to us a Maoist sense of righteousness. There is no doubt about that. With surety we can say that there is a message which tries to convey the righteousness of Maoism in the foreword.

Dr O. K Santhosh: One of the key changes that have happened in the Hindi belt of Central India is the rise to power of subalterns and Dalits. For example, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, Nitish Kumar, among others. When Maoist ways are considered right, aren't these progresses made invisible?

Sunny Kapicadu: I do not think Maoists in Central India are working towards solving the problems of the Adivasis, as claimed by Arundhati

in the book. Maoists are working there because they consider it as a laboratory of Maoism to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. Adivasi issue is just an immediate problem to be confronted as far as they are concerned. There are statements in the book which deliberately overlook the fact that Maoism is not a movement oriented towards solving the Adivasi problems in India.

Another issue is, she states that when talking about corruption there is no point in just blaming Mayawati. However, why doesn't she understand that after Dr Ambedkar it was BSP's emergence that truly created a fundamental rupture in Indian politics? Kanshi Ram was the leader of BSP. He said that he could not sleep after reading *AoC*. It is from that sleeplessness that the great Bahujan movement, BSP, came into existence.

No other example is required to make anybody understand the greatness of *AoC*. Arundhati is writing about a book which has changed the political destiny of people, a book which has influenced many individuals. That is a great responsibility to shoulder. I have to say that she has failed in fulfilling that responsibility.

Translated from Malayalam by **James Michael**.

From Manusmriti to Navayana Publishing: A history of appropriation

~ Naren Bedide (Kuffir)

The following essay has been combined from excerpts of two speeches delivered by Kuffir – one at University of Mumbai during 'The Colonization of Ambedkar: Caste Politics behind Roy-Navayana's Appropriation of Annihilation of Caste ~ A Discussion' *held on 21st December, 2014, and another during the* 'Democratic Debate on Appropriation of Ambedkar's Writings' *held on April 10, 2014, in Hyderabad.*

Brahmanism: Colonization of Words and Land

(in Mumbai)

Jai Bhim to all.

Some of you may be wondering what is this about? Many people, led by 'educated' people, in universities have said earlier, it is just words (Roy-Navayana's attempt to appropriate Babasaheb's *AoC*), it is just writing. How does it affect people on the ground? How does it affect the grassroots? Like we are not grassroots. We are from the grassroots! How does it affect the grassroots, say those who are evicted from slums in Mumbai or Bangalore or wherever. Those who have to fight for land rights in Chhattisgarh or Telangana or wherever. What does it have to do with these people?

So, I will quote A. Roy's own words to tell you what it has to do with these people. This is from a Feb 2001 interview with David Barsamian which appeared in *The Progressive*, a left leaning American monthly magazine. Please note the interview itself is titled as Colonization of Knowledge, so we are not the first ones to speak about colonization of Ambedkar or knowledge, she was the one who started it way back in 2001. I quote from the interview:

"The power of the World Bank is not only its money, but its ability to accumulate and manipulate knowledge. It probably employs more PhDs

than any university in the world. It funds studies that suit its purpose. Then it disseminates them and produces a particular kind of world view that is supposedly based on neutral facts. But it's not. It's not at all. How do you deal with that?"

This has to be understood in that sense. She is quite aware of what colonization of knowledge is. It is not like she suddenly wakes up, and after doing such a good deed of working two whole years reading Ambedkar, 'taking the trouble of reading Ambedkar', writes an introduction and doesn't understand our objections about colonization of knowledge. What she says here about the World Bank (WB); WB does not merely give out loans, it also controls governments, it controls policy, especially policy which effects the poor masses everywhere, in Latin America, Africa, South Asia, in America also. She says, "The power of the WB is not only its money but its ability to accumulate and manipulate knowledge."

So this is about knowledge which is produced and mediated by a certain kind of worldview which is supposed to favour some sections of people and go against certain other sections of people. Control of knowledge is very important. If control of knowledge was not important, Ambedkar would not have said Educate (from his advice: Educate, Agitate, Organize), the first point is to Educate. And this is what the Roy-Navayana project is attempting to do: control Dalitbahujan knowledge, to mediate it, to manipulate it.

Despite the critique of the Roy-Navayana book, it is fast creeping into university libraries across India. Despite their ideological and personal differences, sometimes, with the Roy-Navayana team, an army of savarna academics and journalists and civil society activists are springing up to defend their 'freedom of expression'. Despite her much celebrated 'anti-state' political stance, Roy is being invited to inaugurate new institutions in state universities. Despite her sweeping racialist categorization of the 'Dalit masses' as getting 'hinduized' and being 'suspicious' of any writing on Gandhi and therefore incapable of comprehending that her introduction of *AoC* is actually a 'critique' of his politics, she is being honoured with awards.

Our critique, in the final analysis, is a critique of the whole complex of institutions manned by several armies of committed individuals who operate, sustain and defend Brahminical structures of caste hegemony in India, especially in the sphere of knowledge.

It is not about one World Bank, but several World Bank like institutions that work together in seamless coordination to throttle the voices of the marginalized. It is about the *agraharam* of ancient privileges throbbing within the heart of the new metropolis of power.

In Arundhati Roy's world view, marginalized identities become the biggest obstacles to a universal struggle against the dominant classes or class domination. She doesn't see any irony in the fact that this 'universal' struggle is led by the dominant classes themselves.

In the same 2001 interview so ironically titled as 'The Colonization of Knowledge', she talks about her arrest when she participated in a protest against the Maheshwar dam : 'They arrested thousands of people, including me. They dumped me in a private car that belonged to S. Kumars. It was so humiliating. The jails were full. Because I was there at that time, there was a lot of press and less violence than usual. But people have captured the Maheshwar dam site so many times before, and it doesn't even make it to the news.'

There have been many translations and reprints of the *Annihilation of Caste* before, but *because she wasn't there, the press didn't notice probably.* It is quite clear she is very aware of her caste capital, about how it makes the state and society treat her different from the *hoi polloi.*

What then is the difference between her abuse of her social capital which endows her with some distinct power and edge in social affairs and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the Bharatiya Janata Party openly rewriting history texts and saying that *we will now give the Hindu version of history?* The World Bank version of development is the same thing.

The Parivar wants to make the Bhagvad Gita the 'national book'. Dr Ambedkar had long ago pointed out how the Gita had appropriated several egalitarian & pacifist principles from Buddhist thought to reinforce

the same old varna system. This Navayana project is a similar attempt to appropriate radical Ambedkarite thought to uphold Brahminical hegemony.

The whole history of the Shudras is about how, unlike even the Jews, they were always deprived of the Power of the Word. Every generation had to learn anew what it was to be a Shudra or Atishudra. Because knowledge was not passed on through books or [written] words from generation to generation. It could only be passed on through songs and other forms of theater which is seen mostly as entertainment many a time and not as knowledge itself. Because it does not carry the 'weight', the 'wisdom' which is produced by people who are actually not engaged in any sector of production. Their knowledge is disentangled from labour and production, it is about control and manipulation.

When you come to Mumbai by plane or train, you first see the buildings, you see the sea and then you see the slums. 60% of all major cities- Delhi to Bangalore to Hyderabad to Kolkata to Mumbai is mostly slums. Once I looked it up - what is the area of Mumbai city? Mumbai is around 1 lakh 60,000 acres. Out of which for 30 to 40 years, 30% of this land was locked up in urban ceiling litigation[17]. The Govt did not employ the army to grab the land from the rich and distribute it among the poor. 30% of all land in Mumbai was owned by 20 or 30 families and it was allowed to lay idle. Thus it stayed in litigation for 30-40 years. Mane Sir knows a lot of about this. Now it has been released, and the population has increased so much, the people still don't get a piece of it. How did all this manipulation of resources happen?

Dharavi, the biggest slum, is around 500 acres. Half a million to a million people live there. The rest of the population of Mumbai - around 60%, including the people of Dharavi, occupy another, let's say, 10,000 acres. The remaining 1 lakh 50,000 acres is mostly occupied by the other 40% of the population, which is mostly Savarnas. If you do a real ethnographic study of Mumbai city, you will find that 90% of them (of the 40%) are

17 Bombay Urban Land Ceiling Act Litigations http://indiankanoon.org/search/?formInput=urban%20land%20ceiling+doctypes:bombay (Accessed on 15 November, 2015)

Savarnas. And among the 90%, you will find that 30% are Brahmin. So this is as real as the ground under your feet.

The Brahminical knowledge hegemony works in the same way as the World Bank's research hegemony: it uses the control of knowledge to control resources. The word is as real as the ground under your feet. You have to control or speak your own words. You have to speak in your own voice. You have to listen to your mind and conscience first before you start letting A. Roy tell you what caste is about. Until four years ago, from what Anoop shared, she did not know who Ambedkar was. She knew nothing about Ambedkar. This publisher, because he was looking for a marketable commodity, he went and dragged in this poor person. I have great sympathy for her and admire her as a writer. But her politics have always been regressive in many senses. So this is what this appropriation is about.

When you are deprived of the power of the word, your space shrinks down to merely 5% to 6% of what you deserve. If you are 60% of the population and you get only 5% of the space, literal space, in the city you live in, and you are further marginalized in the space of knowledge also, there is no way you can claim your rights. The evictions and appropriations are connected in very real terms.

That is why our objections to the Roy-Navayana project raise so many hackles across the Brahminical world: in academia, media and 'civil society'. Why are the academics from Savarna castes and Brahmins so very keen on calling our critique as 'reductive crap'? Why can't they say, okay these guys are producing their own book, a compilation of critiques of the Roy-Navayana project, and that is a democratic thing? Why can't they stop there? Because they are inherently incapable of recognizing anyone else's rights. Because our critique is, from a larger perspective, a critique of the whole Brahminical hegemony over knowledge, over our universities, media, civil society. Because it affects their class interests.

As my favorite poet Sivasagar (KG Satyamurthy) says, *I am the soldier and I am the battlefield too*. So everyone is a soldier and the battlefield too. You have to fight for your own mind, for your own voice. You say, 'Arundhati Roy has written, let her write. What is your problem?' If Arundhati Roy

has written, in a scenario where 98% of faculty in central universities are Savarna-Brahmin - who are the faculty going to teach and read in the classroom? Ambedkar or Arundhati Roy? They will segregate the original *AoC* from that book. It will be purely Arundhati Roy, portrayed as being in the forefront in the struggle against caste, which Ambedkar had actually waged, which Phule had waged, Nanak had waged, Kabir had waged, which Buddha had started, which the Charvakas had inspired..

As Anoop pointed out with so many examples, and as James has pointed out - about recent history from the colonial time wherein Phule's and Ambedkar's egalitarian, anti-caste politics were sidelined. So this is not about mere words. 98% savarna faculty reign in central universities - they have never called us for a debate on this subject. It is students from Mumbai University, a state university, who have called us. Central universities are ultra-pure. Students here have organized this event on their own, we don't know how they have done it, and we had nothing to support them. They added our name *Round Table India*, out of their goodness of heart and broad-mindedness. It is they who have conducted the whole event, Suresh Mane Sir who gave the inspiration, the patronage to say, 'please come over, this is also our space'. We don't know how much of this is our space, 5% or 10%. For this day, this is our Dharavi.

So this is not just about A Roy. There are better writers than A Roy... why A Roy? Because she has perfected the art of being the casteless Indian just like Gandhi and Nehru. Nehru writes in his own autobiography, he starts with his ancestors' 'descent'. Like they descended from the Himalayas as gods, like Shivji came down from the Himalayas. Are these Gods? A Roy has perfected this tantalizing state of being casteless. Is this state of castelessness something that's outside Indian polity, outside Indian society - this state of castelessness? Like the yogis and munis who go do penance and go into trances? Is this something like that? How can you be casteless?

Caste is the mode of production in India. This is a caste economy. This is a caste society. 90% of Bahujan are even now engaged in under-capitalized, traditional occupations. That is how your food is produced, your sarees and shirts and everything else is produced. Your jewelry is produced by artisans who are dying. Your fish, whatever fancy names you give and order in posh hotels paying 2000 Rs for two pieces, is produced by

fishermen who are dying, who are being driven out of their homes. This is connected with that.

The first mistake the Bahujan did, one could say, the original sin of the Bahujan world, was to allow the Brahmin to enter into their little shrines - to control the worship of their holy stones, trees, serpents, whatever they considered sacred. They invited the Brahmin to come in with his mumbo jumbo. They allowed the Brahmin to introduce their gods to themselves. It started there. We can't allow that to happen again.

A history of appropriation

(Recorded by Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes)
(in Hyderabad)

Jai Bhim to all.

I will be very brief, I was re-reading Braj Ranjan Mani's *Debrahmanisng History*[18] today. Interestingly, he mentions several instances of interpolations, forgery, appropriations etc., in ancient India. Something Dr Ambedkar had already written about extensively in *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India*. Of Buddhist literature and Shramanic literatures. He also mentions that even the Manusrmiti was not written by any (one) Manu. There were seven Manus we are told, the last one wrote the Manusrmiti, but it is supposedly an interpolation to Purusha Sukta, which was inserted by one Sumati Bhargava, even that is a later interpolation, much later.

We also read about what Sambashiva Rao garu was talking about: the three stages of post-independence India wherein Ambedkar was recognized. If we go back a little in history, 2000 year old history, we also see this pattern, where first there is the cleansing of all Indian literature of Buddhist and Shramanic influences then we come back to the period after Shankara, around 12th century or so, we come to Basava. He is probably the only brahmin who tried to annihilate caste. He had arranged a marriage of a

18 Mani, Braj Ranjan. Debrahminising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society. *Manohar Publishers and Distributors*, 2005.

Brahmin girl with a Dalit boy which resulted in a massive upheaval, and both the parents and girl and boy were killed. Along with lots of other violence perpetrated by the state of that time, one of the key objectives of that counter revolution during and after Basava was to destroy all Vachana literature[19]. That was one of the key objectives of that counter-revolutionary movement.

So we see this particular book (The Doctor and the Saint) with this particular introduction to the most key book of anti-caste literature, which is *Annihilation of Caste*, not as an isolated event. We see it from a historical point of view, we see it as another step in the direction of consolidating brahminical stranglehold on all ideological apparatuses, especially in the cultural field and educational field, and this was one of the concerns expressed by most of the articles published as protest against this book in our portal (*Round Table India*).

I will just briefly summarize what was written or refer to at least one particular article. The annotation part is supposedly looked at as a harmless aspect of this book, but that is the most dangerous aspect in my view. Because one of the writers, actually a couple of our writers, both non-Dalits - they pointed out that out of the 160 or so bibliographical references in that book, around 150 were non-Dalits, there were only 10 or so Dalits and two or three OBCs, out of which Dr Ilaiah was one I think, and there was G. Aloysius also. So this is the most dangerous aspect wherein if you want to know about caste - being from a Dalit or an OBC background - you still have to go back and refer to a Savarna text to learn what caste is about. This is the most dangerous aspect. To know about our lives we have to go back to the brahmin and ask him again, *is this our life*?

So we are not going to stop with this book. Others have talked about this being one book out of the Navayana stable which is objectionable, I don't find that true. We have been researching a long list of their books, the same writers whom I had mentioned earlier have researched Navayana's titles until now. Out of 61 or so, only around 10-12 are written by Dalits

19 Ramdas, Anu. Crossing endogamic boundaries. *Round Table India*, 30 July, 2013. Available at: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6796:crossing-endogamic-boundaries&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

and OBCs, only 2 OBC, the rest are written by brahmins, white people and other savarnas. So this is no anti-caste publishing house, as we knew from the beginning. Even his book on Dr Ambedkar, *Bhimayana* - the text was written by Brahmins; Phule becomes a mali in *Gardener in the Wasteland*. So there is a history and we are not going to stop here. We are going to research, we are going to write, in English, in Telugu. People who are writing are regular people, people who are working, only academics are not writing. They are researching and writing with good substance. People who have read the site probably know about it.

And the third aspect is the politics of the defence of this particular book. We have seen, as Karthik (Karthik Navayan) was also pointing out how the Telugu media, which is contractor media, is standing up for this book. And we see the *Times Of India*, which is corporate media, standing up for this book. And we also see universities and scholars from across India and Europe, America, savarna scholars, standing up for this book, abusing us, calling us all kinds of names, on the site and social media. Because the social media is the only social media for Dalit-Bahujan, there is no other social media for Dalit-Bahujan outside the virtual media, all spaces are anti-social spaces for us, let us be clear about that. They have been calling us all kinds of names, that is also there, that is one structural aspect wherein they are springing up to defend Roy.

Next, ideologically I find no basic difference in the book itself - I have read excerpts and other parts - from what she wrote in 1994[20], when she was writing about Phoolan Devi. She found no caste in her oppression and she finds no caste at all in Dalit oppression even now, forget the Adivasis and OBCs; she doesn't care about their particular situations. She can see them only, as Sambashiva Rao was pointing out, she can only see them as sanitized oppressed individuals and not in their particular locations. She does not understand the hierarchy part of caste.

She says the brahmins oppress the kshatriyas, the kshatriyas oppress the vaisyas, the vaisyas oppress the shudras, the shudras oppress Dalits and among the Dalits the Paraiyars oppress the Arunthathiyars. This is the kind of divisive politics she is playing. There is a structure where there

20 Roy, Arundhati. The Great Indian Rape Trick. *Source:* www.sawnet.org, *22* August , 1994. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

are a few varnas at the top, and the rest have only limited privileges. She wants to confuse the issue. She doesn't understand the hierarchy part of it, even though she literally mentions the word hierarchy. She does not understand it. I don't know how far this structural oppression is from her view of class oppression. There is very clearly a juvenile understanding of the issues at stake here, whether it is in Chattisgarh or here.

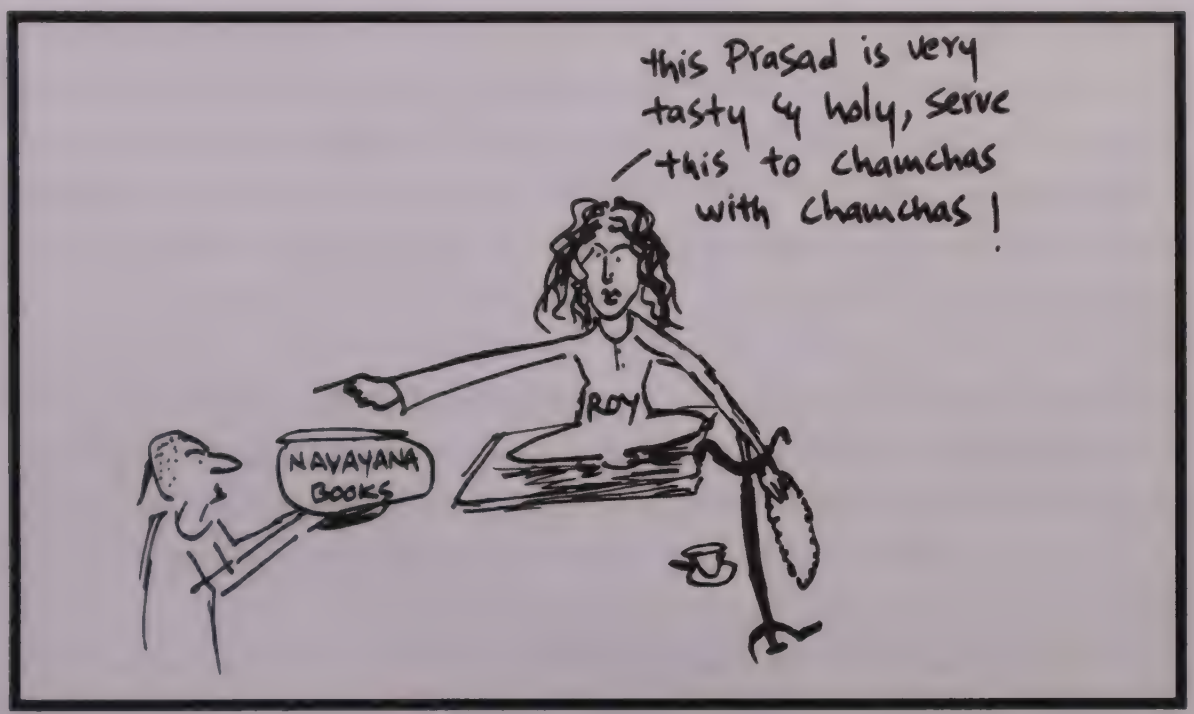
So there is a danger of popular writers (being picked up for their saleability)...tomorrow it could be Chetan Bhagat who would introduce *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, because he is popular. They will bring in Sachin Tendulkar also to introduce the *Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto*. This is cheapening of the debate, why should we debate? It is a pointless exercise, what is there to debate here? It is well known that she is not a Marxist, she clearly says she is not anti-capitalist, she has no commitment to fight against any oppressors as such, she shifts stances, and she doesn't see the universality of all these struggles from the Adivasis, to the Bahujans, to the Dalits to the Blacks. They are all particular struggles for her. They are particular but only in terms of the local oppressors. These are a few problems with her thinking.

And I believe, this fight doesn't end with this, this struggle will not stop with this, and we will not stop opposing this (process of appropriation) with only this book. We will keep researching. Because as Dr Ilaiah probably knows 99% of professors and teachers in central universities right now are savarnas, there are no OBCs, no Dalits, no STs. All of them together don't comprise more than 1-2%. And what is the position in the media, we all know quite well. Even for the sake of just being politically correct, why can't the media say *we will implement affirmative action in our places,* I find CII more acceptable than the Press Council of India. This is a structural fight, A Roy is not an isolated ploy, it could be a mix of all kinds of people playing this game along. This strategy is a counter-revolutionary strategy as Babasaheb would have said, he would have recognized it immediately. As he said there is no difference between a secular/liberal brahmin and a priestly brahmin. They are essentially the same. Because you can't be a liberal and a brahmin. That is an oxymoron.

"I have taken the trouble to read Ambedkar"

~Whatever the Mahatma may choose to say, my object in publishing the speech was to provoke the Hindus to think, and to take stock of their position. I have never hankered for publicity, and if I may say so, I have more of it than I wish or need. But supposing it was out of the motive of gaining publicity that I printed the speech, who could cast a stone at me? Surely not those who, like the Mahatma, live in glass houses. ~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *A Reply to the Mahatma*



Artist: Syama Sundar Unnamati

Dalit Camera writes to Arundhati Roy

~ Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes

Dear Ms Arundhati Roy,

We are writing this letter to clarify our position on the rumours spreading in New Delhi about the cancellation of the launch of the book, Dr B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, introduced by you and published by Navayana. The rumours claim that Dalit activists and intellectuals in Hyderabad have allegedly stalled the event of book launch. It is said that an event at EFL University and other events were cancelled because of the threats of Dalit activists. You know well that the memorial meeting (of Mudasir Kamran) at EFL University you were supposed to address was not permitted by the EFL University Vice Chancellor. The book launch events at *Sundarayya Vignana Kendram* and *Lamakaan* were cancelled by the publisher Navayana.

We deny this well-designed false propaganda. We clarify in no uncertain terms that Dalit activists in Hyderabad were never in favor of stalling the event. The intention has always been to raise criticism of your role in the preparation of the edited book and also the contents of your introduction. Many Dalit activists including myself are not pleased with your introduction and the planning of the event and publicity around your book and your star status. Some activists spoke to Anand and voiced their views strongly including objections to the book launch. The intention is not to stall the event or to ban your views but to make our point that you did not do justice to *Annihilation of Caste*.

Dalit activists have been very critical of your introduction to *Annihilation of Caste*. The entire debate started after excerpts from your introduction were published in *Caravan* and *Outlook*. These excerpts clearly indicate to anyone familiar with *AoC*, that your introduction has very little to do with Ambedkar's text. Whether it is more about Gandhi or not was never the issue, rather the content of *AoC* has been reduced to Gandhi and Ambedkar. The Gandhi and Ambedkar debate, you must be aware, is not part of *Annihilation of Caste*. But you chose to focus on the re-evaluation of Gandhi in comparison with Ambedkar. You did not contextualize

and appreciate the historical significance of *AoC*. After reading the introduction, we feel saddened at your lack of investment in the history of the book and its circulation. For example: In Andhra Pradesh and several other regions of India, Dalit activists have translated *AoC* into regional languages and circulated it free of cost. Such knowledge of Dalit investment in the book is completely lacking in your introduction. Many of us strongly feel that your engagement with Dr B.R. Ambedkar's work, or the Ambedkarite movement or even the text in question is quite minimal.

You may also be aware of the ways in which the Dalit criticism is now being variously described and derogated as "misogynist", "radical", "intolerant" etc. The mainstream media continues to display an abominable lack of knowledge or respect for Dr Ambedkar. Take for instance: an article published in a Telugu daily about your essay had a serious problem. The Andhra Jyothy Daily (apparently unintentionally) translated the title of your introduction to describe Ambedkar as a physician (*Vaidyudu*), while describing Gandhi as a Prophet (*Pravaktha*). When SOME Dalit activists objected to this translation, the Daily promptly apologized and published a corrigendum. Later "The Hindu" described in a news item that the critics of your introduction and Navayana are "Hindu Right-Wing.". We strongly hope this rumor did not lead you to think of Dalit criticism as Hindu Right Wing reaction.

There are other serious problems we have (which have been the premise for Dalit criticism of your introduction). We took time from Anand to meet you in Hyderabad and were planning to take an interview with you. But the programme was cancelled. We were denied an opportunity to seek clarifications and raise criticisms. The following notification was released from the publisher:

"There have been some difficulties in the distribution of the book and it is not yet available, especially in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai etc. Meanwhile, acrimonious debates have been taking place without many people getting a chance to read it. The launch is therefore postponed till such a time as the book is widely available, and more informed conversations can take place."

Navayana conducted the book launch programmes at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and Mumbai without the availability of the book. In the meantime, we hear that rumours are being spread among various intellectuals in New Delhi that the programme was cancelled in response to Dalit threats to stall the event.

We are not sure whether you are aware of all these 'rumours' and calls for your freedom of expression. We do hope that our sincere views and criticisms reach you when you visit Hyderabad very soon for the launch of the book and we have the opportunity to hear you in person. *Enlisted below are some questions we prepared for the interview we wanted to conduct in Hyderabad.* These questions are from several Dalit activists who could not meet you in Hyderabad. We will be happy if you answer them. If you ask, any mainstream paper or magazine will readily publish your reply.

Questions for Ms Roy

- What is your aim of writing the essay "The Doctor and the Saint"? Is this an introduction to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*?

- Your essay does not serve the purpose of an introduction to Ambedkar's classic text *Annihilation of Caste*. You did not track the publication or circulation history or even the historic role of *Annihilation of Caste* in Indian society. In what ways you feel that you are competent to introduce this text?

- Do you share the view that Dalit activists and scholars are better qualified to introduce *Annihilation of Caste* both in terms of their engagement with Ambedkar and their life experience?

- Have you done any research on Dalit community and its history? Have you been part of the Dalit movements? I ask this question as many Dalit activists and scholars are criticizing your patronizing attitude to Ambedkar?

- Your essay reads more like an essay on re-appraisal of Gandhi. Ambedkar is merely used to introduce Gandhi. What is your response?

- My strong criticism is that you have done injustice to Ambedkar's text and in fact, provided scope for misreading Ambedkar on many issues?

- Do you feel that you are an authority (in terms of your research or involvement in Dalit politics) on Ambedkar and therefore, you are competent to assess Ambedkar's position on capitalism, Adivasis, Brahmanism, caste etc?

- How can you justify your criticisms of Ambedkar without engaging with his writings and practice in a historical manner? How can you arrive at Ambedkar's views on Capitalism and Adivasis by reading just *Annihilation of Caste*? Don't you think there is something fundamentally wrong with this approach?

- Are you aware that the paradigm of representing Ambedkar along with Gandhi is a reading strategy of the elite and upper castes? Even a recent anthology of Ambedkar's writings such as *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar* (edited by Valerian Rodrigues) introduces Ambedkar through Gandhi in the introduction. Why can't we read Ambedkar on his own terms?

- What will you do to bring *Annihilation of Caste* and Ambedkar to the public discussion? Will you consider withdrawing this introduction and publishing it as a separate essay on Gandhi or Indian politics?

- Dalits feel cheated that you and Navayana GOT all the media attention (*The Outlook, The Hindu, Andhra Jyothy* etc) but the title *Annihilation of Caste* by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is just used. Why did you use Ambedkar in this manner? Do you feel now that it is unethical?

- One last question: The poster for the launch of the book says "In conversation with Bojja Tharakam." The focus is on your introduction, "The Doctor and the Saint." Do you need Ambedkar or any Dalit intellectual for this discussion?

Arundhati Roy Replies to Dalit Camera

Dear Friends at Dalit Camera

Thank you for your letter and your straightforward questions on this complicated and vital debate.

I am not aware of what rumours are circulating in Hyderabad or what sources local newspapers there were using to speak about the event. Let me clarify that there was no connection between the cancellation of the EFLU event and the cancellation of the book launch in Hyderabad. And yes, the launch was cancelled by Navayana for a number of reasons, including an SMS that was circulated that said: "Save Ambedkar writings. Oppose Navayan publication. *Annihilation of Caste* is our holy book. Arundhati Roy and Anand. S contaminated it. Participate in the protest on 9th March at Sundarraya Vignana Kendram, Hyderabad."

I do not know who sent this message around, it could be anybody, even non-Dalit mischief makers, of whom there are plenty, who would certainly want this book out of the way. But since the book was not available and few people had read it, you will agree, given the climate in our country, that it would have been foolhardy to let a situation like this play out. (And while some may want to claim it as a holy book, let me quote Ambedkar from his 1937 preface to the second edition of *Annihilation of Caste*: "The speech prepared by me for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore has had an astonishingly warm reception from the Hindu public *for whom it was primarily intended.*"). Emphasis mine. The mis-translation of The Doctor and the Saint into Telugu in the daily Andhra Jyothy , completely missed the irony in my title, and this is unfortunate. I must add that the ironical reference to Gandhi as a 'Saint' comes from Ambedkar's own sarcasm in what he called his "Reply to the Mahatma" (included in the Navayana edition) in which he calls Gandhi a politician-saint and consistently refers to him as the "Mahatma".

I wish to clarify for those who are accusing you of trying to ask for a ban on the book that this is not the case. You obviously disagree with it, you dislike my introduction. It's a debate, a somewhat acrimonious one, but nothing more. About the derogatory adjectives that are being used

to describe the debate—what can I say? I cannot be held responsible for what others say. The internet is an insult machine. If it's any consolation, I'm sure I'd be among the finalists in the race for the most insulted people. We can do nothing more than keep a cool head.

Now let me try and answer some of your other questions.

First of all, on the subject of representation. This is crucial. So much of Ambedkar's political work, and ironically, a large part of my introduction deals with this. Our debate of course is not about the political representation of Dalits in general, but whether a non-Dalit can/should have written this introduction at all. It is not a new debate, but one that the Civil rights movement in the USA, Feminists all over the world, the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, and the Queer Movement deal with all the time. If it is your case that a Dalit would be able to give the world a more accurate description of the lived experience of being Dalit, I agree with you. If it is your case that only Dalits can write an introduction about Ambedkar, then I must disagree with you. What if tomorrow Gujarati banias say only they can write about Gandhi? Or Mahars say that their understanding of Ambedkar is more authentic and more radical than that of other Dalits?

On the issue of caste, unlike in the other debates, the issue of the 'authentic victim' is one that is more vexed than ever. Once again, let's turn to Ambedkar who said " there is no such class as a completely unprivileged class except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the low is privileged as compared with the lower. Each class being privileged, every class is interested in maintaining the system."

If it is your case that a Dalit writing about Ambedkar will have a different reading from a non-Dalit, a privileged caste Hindu, then I agree with you—though I would still exercise caution against essentialism of this sort. But to say that every Dalit reading is automatically 'authentic' and every non-Dalit reading is 'misleading' is not something that I agree with. The point is, whatever my privileges are—or yours for that matter—are we fighting against Brahminism or strengthening it? If it is your argument

that through my introduction I am somehow actually perpetuating caste, please tell me how that is so.

Ambedkar was a man with a phenomenal breadth of scholarship—he wrote about Marxism, Islam, Buddhism, law, the economy, and he was the Chairman of the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution that governs every single Indian citizen. In *Annihilation of Caste* he indicts several of Hinduism's sacred texts, he writes about socialism, about Adivasis, about Muslims and Sikhs. Who can police who is allowed to write about him, comment on his texts, or introduce them, and who is not?

In the past I have written about Big Dams, Nuclear bombs, Corporate Globalization and many other things. Each time people have had objections—similar to yours— about the fact that I have written about them, without being a displaced person, or a bomb expert, or an economist.

Have I 'researched' Dalit history? Have I been part of Dalit movements? Do I consider myself an authority on Ambedkar? Do I think Dalit scholars are better placed to write an introduction to *Annihilation of Caste*? How can any non-Dalit be part of a Dalit movement when you will not even concede that they have the right to engage with Ambedkar? On the subject of my engagement with caste, my past work as well as this introduction might contain the answer. I am not a Dalit, I am not a Hindu, and I am not an authority on Ambedkar, though I have, unlike many people, including many Dalits, taken the trouble to read him. I do not write from a position of authority. I write from the position of a writer who engages with things that she feels are important to her, and to the society that she lives in. I am sure there are several scholars, both Dalit and non-Dalit who are better placed to write an introduction to *Annihilation of Caste* far more knowledgeable than mine. They should go ahead and do so. There is no limit on the number of introductions that can be written. As you know, and as you yourself say, it is a text that has existed for 80 years, it has been circulated, distributed and translated into several languages. Mine is just one more introduction—not the best, not the greatest and certainly not the last—to one more edition. And this edition will not, cannot, despite the space it has received in two mainstream magazines—match the circulation of the others which numbers in the tens of thousands.

As far as I know, the only thing special about the Navayana edition is that it has been extensively annotated. This too has come in for criticism. The fact is that in Annhilation of Caste Ambedkar makes a range of references, to incidents, to philosophical concepts, to scholars and philosophers, and he cites Sanskrit slokas without translating them. The annotations try to explain all of this. How does this constitute a crime?

You say I patronize Ambedkar? I find that offensive. Why would I spend so much time reading what he wrote, and writing this introduction, just in order to patronize him? Here's what I say: "More than anything else, what Ambedkar brought to a complicated, multifaceted political struggle, with more than its fair share of sectarianism, obscurantism and skullduggery, was intelligence."

Does this sound patronizing to you? My introduction ends by saying: "Can caste be annihilated? Not unless we show the courage to rearrange the stars in our firmament. Not unless those who call themselves revolutionary develop a radical critique of Brahminism. Not unless those who understand Brahminism sharpen their critique of capitalism. And not unless we read Babasaheb Ambedkar. If not inside our classrooms then outside them. Until then we will remain what he called the "sick men" and women of Hindustan, who seem to have no desire to get well."

This is patronizing?

Finally, on the question of the amount of space that Gandhi occupies in my introduction. I do know, and was fully aware of the fact that there are sections of Dalit intellectuals who object to Gandhi even being mentioned when we speak of Ambedkar. I disagree. In his preface to the 1937 edition to *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar says: "Besides Mr Gandhi, many others have already criticized my views as expressed in this speech. But I have felt that in taking notice of such adverse comments, I should limit myself to Mr Gandhi. This I have done, not because what he has said is so weighty, but because to many a Hindu he is an oracle so great that when he opens his lips it is expected that the argument must close and no dog must bark."

It was Ambedkar's debate with Gandhi over the *Annihilation of Caste* and Ambedkar's own voluminous writings on Gandhi that led me to look at Gandhi in a completely different way from the one we have been brainwashed into. Gandhi thwarted Ambedkar at every step. But who, other than Dalits, knows this? Today, there is a huge project within the establishment and its pet intellectuals, to co-opt Ambedkar into being the junior partner in *Gandhi*'s fight against caste. All the anti-caste poets and intellectuals, including those who renounced Hinduism, are being made part of the great Hindu pantheon, and this includes Ambedkar himself.

Ambedkar has written so much on Gandhi and Gandhism—in *Gandhism, the Doom of Untouchables*, he says "some have so much faith in it that they do not hesitate to offer it as an alternative to Marxism." Gandhi has by no means gone away. He continues to embody the moral co-ordinates of the Indian nation state. The Indian Government is still going about getting Gandhi statues placed in countries abroad. He is India's greatest and most unique export. It may be true that Dalits, for the most part, have not been indoctrinated in Gandhism as much as the rest of us have. But all over the world he is a great great hero—even for Africans and African Americans who he had such contempt for. Marxism has taken a huge hit after the fall of the Soviet Union, but Gandhi continues to be thought of as the embodiment of goodness and saintliness. Moving the Gandhi monument out of the way in order for a reader to get to Ambedkar's writing cannot be done casually, carelessly or in a couple of paragraphs. That would do more harm than good.

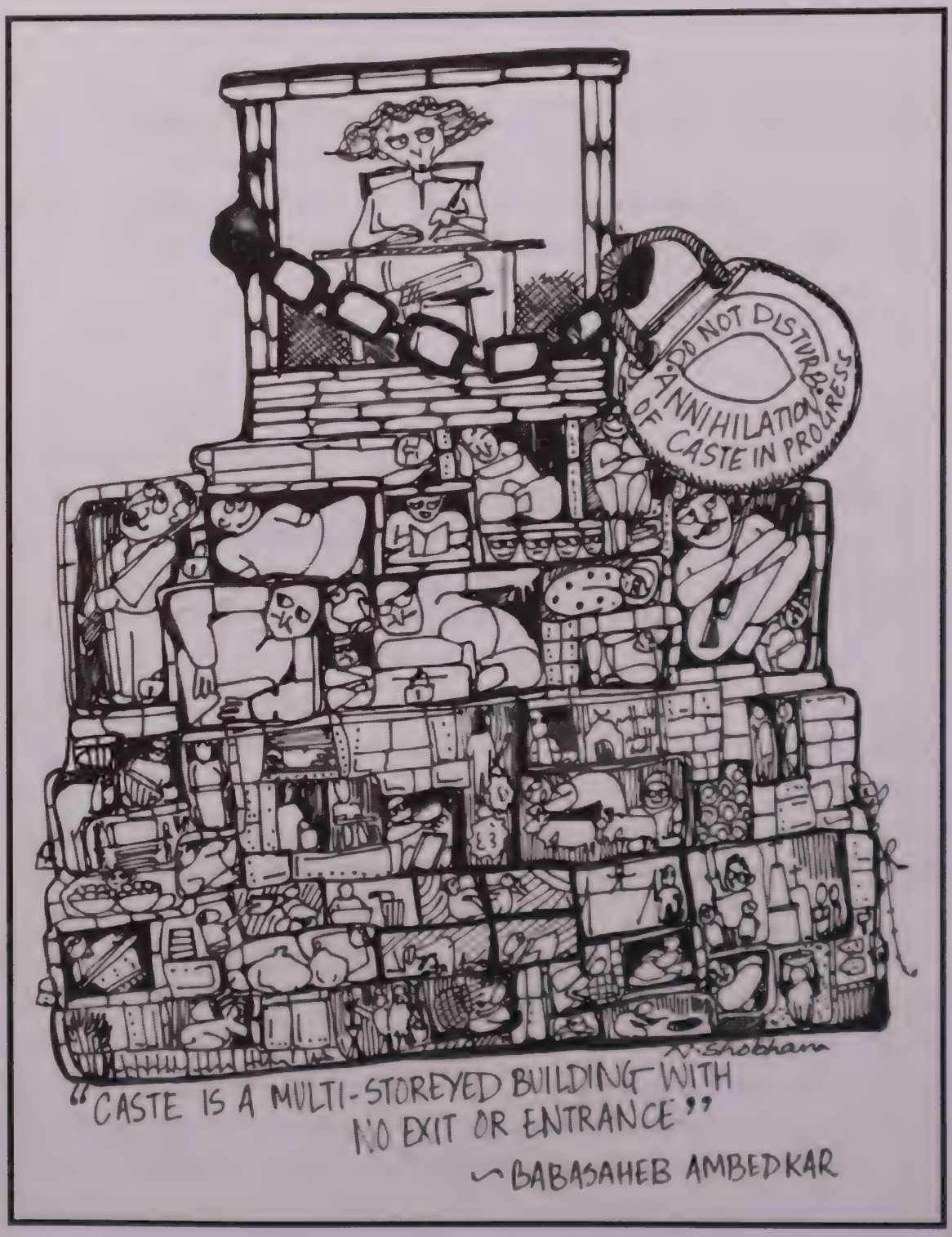
Anyway, these are my thoughts. This is my introduction. It may not fit into your notion of what such an introduction should be. But perhaps we have different readerships in mind? I was writing for those in India,and as well as outside, who are new to the subject, for whom caste is just some exotic Hindu thing. (I saw a new line of handbags in a department store in the US called 'Brahmin.') I am sorry that you have reacted with such anger to my introduction, because it is written in complete and absolute solidarity with the anti-caste movement, and because I believe that caste corrodes us all.

With best wishes,
Arundhati Roy

Mahatmas raise dust, but raise no level

~ Why then do the caste Hindus get irritated? The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behavior with them on a par insults them. Your status is low. You are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung; and then alone they will allow you to live happily. The moment you cross your level, the struggle starts.~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Speech delivered at the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference, 31st May 1936.*


DO NOT DISTURB
ANNIHILATION OF CASTE IN PROGRESS
N. Shobhana
"CASTE IS A MULTI-STOREYED BUILDING WITH NO EXIT OR ENTRANCE"
~BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

Artist: Nidhin Shobhana

Introducing Arundhati Roy and Friends

~ Karthik Navayan

On March 9, 2014, the publisher Navayana had planned to launch its 'Annotated Critical Edition' of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste with an introduction by Arundhati Roy, in Hyderabad city. The event was cancelled because of 'distribution issues' according to the publisher. But the spin put on the cancellation, especially by the corporate media, was an attempt to pin the blame on some Dalit activists and others who had raised some objections to the introduction.

Presented below are the reflections of the writer, who had planned to be a participant at the book launch. They follow his thoughts – on the book and its introduction; on the debates that followed on social media; the coverage of the issue in the Telugu media and elsewhere; on the protests and the savarna protests against the protests. And on Arundhati Roy's seemingly endless circle of friends and supporters in the media, academia, civil society etc., who sprang up to defend her and her 'introduction.'

Do not allow those that have historically oppressed and continue to oppress you today to define your history, reality and interests for you. To say this is not rocket science. Nor is it racist. It is just common sense.
~ Runoko Rashidi

Her friends in the corporate media

On March 6, 2014, *Andhra Jyothy*, the Telugu daily, published an excerpt from Arundhati Roy's introduction, 'The Doctor and The Saint' which was translated as "*Oka Vaidyudu Oka Pravakta*", which actually means "The Medical Doctor and the Prophet"

Without any prejudice, I feel that there was a problem with that title, 'The Doctor and The Saint'. Ambedkar is addressed as *The Doctor* by Arundhati Roy simply because he had a PhD, and was certified to be a Doctor of Philosophy. So the word philosopher is a more suitable term to address Dr Ambedkar in Telugu; but why was Gandhi addressed as

a prophet? Does he have any certificate to be called a prophet (as in the *Andhra Jyothy* translation)? No. The moral here is: anything that upgrades a dominant caste person will be justified, normalized and accepted. However, upgrading the position of a marginalized caste individual is unacceptable. And *Andhra Jyothy* ended up proving that.

The better translation in Telugu would have been the use of any of the following words, signifying a philosopher, thinker, scholar etc: 1) *Tatvavetta*, 2) *Darshanikudu*, 3. *Vidwaansudu*. But none of these words were used while referring to Ambedkar. They took it for granted that no one would care.

However, they put in a lot of effort to upgrade Gandhi in the translation. A better word for 'saint' in Telugu would have been: 1. *Muni* 2. *Sanyasi* 3. *Sadhu*. But none of these words were used for Gandhi, they went on referring to him as *pravakta* (prophet), which is not relevant in any sense. Why were these extra efforts spent on upgrading Gandhi and why such neglect for Ambedkar? A wrong term was used to reduce Ambedkar's status and another wrong term was used to upgrade Gandhi's status.

When I expressed these objections to S. Anand, the owner of Navayana, he responded and spoke to the people concerned in *Andhra Jyothy*. But on the following day, March 7, they published only an explanation and not an apology. And they did not publish the corrected translation of the title in Telugu referring to Ambedkar as philosopher. On the same evening, Battula Ramprasad, a Dalit activist, issued another statement demanding that the title be re-published in Telugu. Then on March 8, *Andhra Jyothy* re-published the title calling Ambedkar a philosopher.

Andhra Jyothy's explanation was, "Some people opined that prophet is not a suitable word for saint". How funny! When we speak facts, they turn it into our opinion, while they project their opinions as facts!

Arundhati Roy says that she addressed Gandhi as a saint, because Ambedkar also addressed him in the same way in a sarcastic manner. But why is it needed in the title itself, why compare Ambedkar with Gandhi? Gandhi is not a saint like Kabir, Ravidas, Basava, Pothuluri Veerabrahmam, Gadge Baba etc. He is, in fact, more like Asaram Bapu

and Nityananda Swamy. Why do the translators in the Telugu media keep on saying he is a prophet?

Now, let us take a look at the dubious and conflicting reasons given for the cancellation of the event by the media, the publishers and Arundhati Roy.

Arundhati Roy in her reply to Dalit Camera mentioned a message (an SMS), which was circulated among some activists asking them to protest against Arundhati Roy and S. Anand on March 9, 2014. However, I had sent another message almost immediately, to the same set of people, to quell their misgivings, saying this: "Dear friends, our protest against Arundhati Roy and S. Anand is limited to questioning the commercialization of Ambedkar. We are not going to demand a ban on the book nor are we going to burn the book. We are preparing questions and we will just ask them. That is what our protest shall be". Why was this SMS not mentioned in her response? Why did she selectively mention only the first message sent by a stray mischief monger?

The *Times of India*[21] reported that there were "right wing activists and caste-based groups" involved in the proposed protest against Arundhati Roy and S. Anand. But there were no caste groups or right wing activists involved in the proposed protest. Some friends wanted a democratic debate on the issue, how can they baselessly turn it into a right wing activity?

S. Anand also explained, "We have stated clearly that there have been some difficulties in the distribution of the book and it is not yet available, especially in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, etc. Meanwhile, acrimonious debates have been taking place without many people getting a chance to read it. The launch is therefore postponed till such a time as the book is widely available, and a more informed conversation can take place. We mentioned no right-wing or caste-based groups. We cannot help it if media distorts and misreports. Our statement is here (available at the Navayana website): I further wish to clarify that no-one from *ToI* called me; nor did anyone from *The Hindu* call me when the earlier report appeared."

21 Salvadore, Sarah. "Arundhati's visit to city called off." *Times of India*, 10 March, 2014.

Further, he also pointed out to me the note by the management of *Lamakaan*, one of the venues where the book was to be launched, which said:

"*Lamakaan* vehemently objects to the spin imparted to the postponement of an event planned at our venue, the event – the launch of "The *Annihilation of Caste*" (sic) was postponed by Navayana for the reasons stated in their statement appended below.

Lamakaan did not impute any further motives to any group with regards the cancellation or postponement of this event. That reporter, while speaking to *Lamakaan* attempted to compare the cancellation of the Kashmir event with the postponement of Navayana's book launch. The *Lamakaan* representative insisted that the two cannot be compared. No further categorization of the postponement was issued from our side. *Lamakaan* is an open cultural and political education space with the objective of engendering public debate and we stay committed to that goal.

The book launch will happen when, as the publisher statement testifies, more people have had a chance to read the book."

The *Times of India* reporter who filed the report maintained that the information was given to her by the organizers. So who was responsible for the news that branded Dalits as right-wingers and caste groups?

Her friends in civil society

We might find some clues to answer the above question about who could be responsible from the following responses: here is one Facebook comment by Kavita Krishnan, Politburo member of CPI (ML) Liberation:

"I was in Hyderabad recently and was seriously appalled to hear that Arundhati's piece is apparently being construed by some as being demeaning of Ambedkar and 'devoting more space to Gandhi'. If this is indeed the nature of the criticism that is being made the pretext for the denial of permission, it is a travesty of reason and a deliberate, mischievous misreading of her article, not much unlike the *Hindutvavadi*'s misreading of Doniger."

Have the dominant caste media and intellectuals come to a common understanding to brand Dalits as *Hindutvavadis*?

I, then, asked her (on Facebook): "Who told you this story? Did you speak to Anand Navayana before making this false statement comparing Dalits with *Hindutvavadis*? Know the facts. And don't put your opinions as facts". She came up with this response, "Why get accusatory. I am happy to be corrected. I was misinformed; it's an honest mistake, not a falsehood being propagated".

I wrote back: "There is no accusatory [tone] in my comment just asking you to clarify before posting. But you accused us as *Hindutvavadis.*"

So one can see that they never hesitate to call Dalits whatever they want, even if it is false - is this not caste arrogance and power over Dalits? If Dalits are casteists and *Hindutvavadis*, then show us the history, where Dalits committed atrocities and killed dominant castes.

Her friends in the academia

"*Annihilation of Caste*" is not only a scholarly article; it is also the collective pain of a community. From 1936 till date, many people, with common concerns, emotions and a shared sense of responsibility, introduced this 60 page book to each other, without any or at minimal cost.

Dalit intellectuals like Bojja Tharakam have published *Annihilation of Caste* in Telugu and distributed the copies free of charge. However, now it is being sold for Rs. 525 per copy by Navayana.

People like Arundhati Roy have taken 80 years to read Dr B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*. But now they ask protesting Dalits to *read first and then speak*! Is this not evidence of their arrogance and power over Dalits?

Annihilation of Caste was written by Dr B.R. Ambedkar in 1936. It is available online for free downloads. Just type the title in Google, press enter and you will get it. Ambedkar's writings are also available online for free download at the Columbia University website.[22] Whereas none

22 http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/ (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

of the Indian universities have touched Ambedkar's writings; they do not even think of hosting them on their websites. Ambedkar is still an untouchable for Indian universities and academicians.

However, now this spiced up text produced by these elite leftists is meant to be consumed by savarnas and white people, who are not aware of caste. Because all their show business (of playing the saviour to other marginalized groups) is over now, they have to now face the truth of caste (which they were denying all this while), so they feel the need to speak about *Annihilation of Caste* and Ambedkar.

On the issue of the introduction by Roy, one is reminded how someone had similarly written an introduction to Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*[23], some time ago. However, they never referred to Ambedkar anywhere in that text. One wonders, why does Arundhati Roy bring in Gandhi as a Saint while introducing Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*? The title of Arundhati Roy's introduction is itself a problem. She should change the title and Gandhi should be removed from the title.

Any debate with savarna intellectuals and academicians is useless, they never agree with the truth while debating with Dalits. This could be an apt analogy: when we tell them that they are driving on the wrong side, they tell us that they are using indicator, horn and brake! Look at any philosophical debates between savarna academicians and Dalits, and you will agree with me.

Her friends in the *agraharas*

Actually the book "*Annihilation of Caste*" is directly addressed to all savarnas to change their caste mindsets. It is not addressed to Dalits. They better read the book and start practicing some morals and rationales proposed by Dr Ambedkar in the book. If one wants to write on annihilation of caste, it is better to write on the modern forms of caste and how caste still controls the life of the dominant castes, instead of writing an irrelevant introduction to *Annihilation of Caste*.

23 Parel, Anthony. Gandhi: 'Hind Swaraj' and Other Writings. *Cambridge University Press*, 1997.

Dr Ambedkar's writings are wilfully neglected by the savarna academia and intelligentsia. But with one introduction by a savarna intellectual, the untouched (by savarnas) *Annihilation of Caste* may get an entry into savarna academic *agraharas*. Will the readers who purchase the book for the sake of the introducer really read and understand Ambedkar's arguments on caste addressed to them? At least, now they agree that there are some people who don't want to read Dr B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* without an introduction by some savarna. *This is caste, untouchability, and discrimination.*

Ambedkar was criticized and judged in this introduction, but when Dalits criticize Arundhati Roy and S. Anand, they are branded as *Hindutvavadis*. So they can criticize Ambedkar but no one should criticize them - is this not castearrogance? As they are not accepting Dr B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* as it is, we are not going to take their introduction as it is. They will be questioned and criticized.

What will the orthodox Brahmins do now once they buy *Annihilation of Caste* just because Arundhati Roy wrote an introduction? Will they sprinkle some *gomuthra* (cow urine) or *ganga jal* on Dr B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* to purify it, before taking it into their homes and libraries? As it was written by an untouchable and had adorned millions of untouchable homes for the last 80 years.

The Judge, the Jury and the Goddess

~ Akshay Pathak

Bada hua to kya hua, jaise ped khajur
Panthi ko chahya nahi, fal lage ati door

Of what use is stature, much like a date tree,
Offers no shade for travelers, its fruit beyond reach.

~ Kabir

May in Bikaner is a very hot and dry month. But regular gusts of dust-laden winds breathe life into sun-filled days. The dogs, leading rather imperilled lives, lord over time, either stretched out on a wet patch by the road or standing guard to attack a passing motorbike. Occasionally, they disperse at the sight of a stone in the hands of some bratty boy. In this town, afternoons hang lazily, like defunct clocks in museums.

On such summer afternoons, lost in thought, my palms moist with sweat, I would begin to randomly re-read Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The book that meant more to me than the first kiss of a lover. To many like me, children of middle-class families, with savarna Hindu names and all that comes with them, Arundhati Roy's subsequent political and polemical writings were eye-openers. Our boring, comfortable, mediocre, and deluded lives were as if given a reality-check. Along with a little packet of hope in the shape of well rounded lyric that often came as a freebie hidden in the mass-produced chunks of fine paper. She annoyed everyone whose politics I could not stand and that in itself became a reason for fascination for a rebellious young boy of sixteen.

I would resist calling myself a fan. I must confess, however, that I began reading her with some zeal. In her famous speech 'Come September', she laid out her philosophy succinctly: "The theme of much of what I write," she said, "is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they're engaged in." I was in love. With her words. Armed with these polemics I marched into the big bad world, ready to talk about and, when it suited me, take on injustice, even if it meant pinching

paisas from my paltry income at the time to buy her latest book. But things, as even Estha and Rahel found out, can change in a day.

~

After tantalising us for several months, on March 1, 2014, the publisher of Navayana, S. Anand, a fine and fiery writer himself, and a personal friend, finally broke the suspense he was building for a lot of us who spend a ridiculously huge amount of time on social media. The Annotated Critical Edition of Dr Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, the speech that was never given. But the surprise here was the 180-page-long introduction by none other than Arundhati Roy, the Goddess of Fighting the Status Quo. Never mind that the speech is freely available for download on the internet or sold for less than 50 rupees along with other brilliant writings of Dr Ambedkar at book-stalls at Railway stations, and stationary-cum-bookshops in small towns. But the mischievous ghost of capitalism seems to have come knocking on Arundhati Roy's door one night, as it does on all our doors to make us pay our *hafta*. The same ghost that found its way into her ink and pen (as on previous occasions when she must have written her crushing words), and polished her words to lend them, this time around, a price tag of Rs. 525. Available at book stores and online if you can pay by credit-card or debit-card or internet banking, all provided by CCAvenue Customer Service which 'provides the service on behalf of the merchant site Navayana.org.' This offers you a discount (yay!) too.

Excerpts of the essay meanwhile appeared in national dailies and premier magazines: *Outlook, Caravan, The Hindu*. A frenzy of activity was unleashed on social media. Some of us did get excited at first, many still feel the same. But slowly as the days unfolded, other opposing voices were heard and some like me had to reassess our own sense of jubilation. Criticisms emerged from all corners, from both the left and right (whatever that means in the Indian political scenario today), from Gandhians who came up with their usual defence of the Mahatma and Ambedkarites and Dalits who felt offended, rightly so, at an attempt at reducing Babasaheb's relevance yet again by positing him with Gandhi. All this, particularly the voices at *Round Table India*, brought forth some very pertinent points. To borrow someone's style I shall attempt to sum up what I found to be of most significance:

We live in a nation ruled by dominant caste-and upper class leaders. We watch television channels owned by dominant caste tycoons, watch debates anchored by dominant caste anchors. We read books written, published, sold by dominant caste and class writers and publishers. We are a nation for the privileged castes and classes. *Namak hum jale par abhi bhi chidakte hain.* (We still sprinkle salt on others' wounds). The siege, we must always remember, began thousands of years ago.

But who will cast those stones? Not me, with my Brahmin name and the filthy privilege and power that it comes with.

~

The comfortable, complacent liberal mind will immediately spot shades of radicalism in my argument. Ironic, for we are talking about Arundhati Roy - the high priestess of radical polemic. Moreover, radicalism cannot be set aside for dubious notions of Freedom of Expression. This is not just about reporting on a resistance movement or bringing to light gross injustices that the privileged might be perpetrating here and now that need immediate attention. There is a whole historical context to 'lending voices' to those who have been denied something as basic as language. The Dalit movement has fought against the very notion of who speaks for them, where and how. Our privilege to talk about Freedom of Expression, our ability to enjoy that so-called freedom often inadvertently comes at a cost to millions of others. And if we remember what an earlier sermon taught us: "We know" (do we?) that "there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."[24]

Paradoxically, around the same time that the book was unveiled, with its promise to bring Dr Ambedkar to savarna Hindus, white and other ignorant readers, a fantastic event was underway. The *Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra* (The Dalit Women's Self-respect March)[25]a 'month-long (February 17 to March 13, 2014) journey of Dalit activists' through Delhi and the villages around it, Haryana, Punjab, UP, Bihar, Orissa and Maharashtra.

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24 Roy, Arundhati. The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture. 4 November, 2004.

25 Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra. *National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR).* February, 2014. More on: http://www.ncdhr.org.in/events-1/dalit-mahila-swabhiman-yatra (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

The *yatra* was held with the aim to 'seek accountability of institutions and mechanisms mandated to protect Dalit women; to 'seek to end impunity and crack injustice.' This historic moment, as expected, did not feature even in news reports or get pages in the very magazines that have extensive passages from Arundhati Roy's essay.

Meanwhile, privileged India was gearing up to buy and read or decorate their drawing rooms with the annotated critical edition brought out by Navayana. The same people who, in an attempt at farcical social reform, according to Arundhati Roy's introduction to the book, "brought [the Untouchables] into the big house, but kept [them] in the servants' quarters."

There is an unmistakable and sinister irony in the fact that it takes a celebrity and extremely privileged writer, though with some credentials of having stood up against injustice, and having faced trouble for that too, to be 'strategically' used by a publisher as a PR agent for a man who means the world to the most discriminated against people in India. This is not to be blamed on her but we do extend that logic to every symbol of power in this horribly unequal world. When the noose of moral choice is tightened by a writer like Roy on almost every symbol of unbridled power, it is a moment of sadness for someone who used to admire her to witness these double standards. That she forgets the clear hijacking of a text so pertinent. That she, by painting herself as the brave one, however 'reluctantly', challenging the status of a 'Mahatma', comes across as vying for attention.

Read the introduction and critique the essay is what one would be told. The rule of the neo-Brahmin: Blame or question the *shastra* not the *shastri*? Where have we heard that before? But indeed a more intelligent and intellectual interrogation of her essay will surely follow. I am neither an expert nor the right person to do it. But as someone who might share the drawing room space where this discussion might happen, I felt the need to flag these concerns.

Roy points out her discomfort at Dr Ambedkar's views on Adivasis and so one is also compelled to ask her: Does she not realize what the terrible symbolism of her coming to the 'rescue' of Dr Ambedkar's legacy means? We have not just been blessed with the essay but there is a whole marketing

blitz around this event which has completely sidelined the actual text of *AoC*, which makes one wonder would she not have considered what this means to the many Dalit-Bahujan who are the inheritors and crusaders fighting the battle that Babasaheb fought so bravely? Not that one wants to gag 'free speech' or decide who can and cannot talk about Dr Ambedkar but this is about representation. Even when done with the best of intentions (which in itself sounds patronizing), it has far-reaching implications. It is a sad moment when a writer who has never shied away from pointing out the evils of structural injustice, becomes the very symbol of that same structure. And does it with some unhidden hubris. In the interview to *Outlook*[26] she says, "Many Dalits and Dalit scholars have, over the decades, been very sharply critical of Gandhi and Gandhism. Having said that, if this book begins another debate, a *real* (emphasis mine) debate, it can only be a good thing. I think it's high time that there was one." So the 'real' debate must now begin for the 'fake' voices have not made the cut to this 'premiere' of the star-studded extravaganza?

As Anoop Kumar, someone who has been critiquing (some say attacking) the choice of Arundhati Roy as the 'messiah' to bring Dr Ambedkar to newer readers, points out in a rather angry and relevant essay "Resisting a Messiah" (also featured in this book), "I am merely resisting your messiah status now being thrust on us. Just for the simple reason that it is more difficult to dislodge a messiah, a mahatma, than to create one. We spent some seven decades and enormous efforts in dislodging one, thrust on us quite forcefully, by others who also were as persuasive as you are today in claiming that it was only in our best interests."

Moreover, the implied suggestion that Arundhati Roy will bring Dr Ambedkar to the world, is a horrible insult to a great figure like Babasaheb. That he needs an Arundhati Roy. Whereas it is by now evident that the opposite is the case: Arundhati Roy arguably comes out as the dominating face, unwittingly perhaps, in this whole episode, as she travels around the country giving interviews, talks, posing for photo-ops while Dr Ambedkar's picture on the cover of the plushly produced book in question stares at us, perhaps somewhat perplexed at the whole deal. In what sounds slightly megalomaniacal and very similar to the man she indicts in her introduction to the book – Gandhi, she tells the India pages

26 Naqvi, Saba. "We Need Ambedkar--Now, Urgently...", *Outlook*, 10 March, 2014.

of the *New York Times*[27]: "I know that when it comes out, a lot is going to happen. But it's something I need to do." The NYT piece is a profile on her life and works. What brilliant and opportune timing and what better way to 'introduce' Dr Ambedkar to the U.S of A!

Anoop Kumar concludes quite poignantly by quoting Babasaheb from his discussion with Gandhi in 1931: "History tells that mahatmas, like fleeting phantoms, raise dust but raise no level."

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Symbols are inherently powerful. They can bring about revolutions but they can often perpetuate hegemony and continue to maintain the status quo. The large majority of people living under the brutally unjust culture in this broken republic have been denied basic human existence for centuries. Dr Ambedkar is needed urgently, as Arundhati Roy points out, but for whom? He exists in every breath taken by millions and millions of Dalit-Bahujan in the country and the world over. It is time perhaps we with our privileges of caste, class etc., and the freedom they afford us - while trampling on others' freedoms - realized that Dr Ambedkar's ideas and his message cannot suddenly be celebrated for our own self-loathing, guilty selves, to silence the murmurs of our conscience. We cannot pat our backs for packaging them in a bottle of expensive cologne to be sprinkled on our fancy clothes for an evening of intellectual congress. In the hope that it trickles down. His message is already gushing up from below. I am aware of the irony of my own privilege that has made this very vocabulary I use and where I use it possible. But navigating the slippery slope of freedom, any kind of strategic silence could also amount to a form of curbing expression or putting an end to our imaginations.

27 Deb, Siddhartha. Arundhati Roy, the Not-So-Reluctant Renegade. *The New York Times*, 5 March, 2014.

Vedic Chants for the 21st Century

~ Round Table India

"I had none of the conditioning that a normal, middle class Indian girl would have. I had no father, no presence of this man telling us that he would look after us and beat us occasionally in exchange. I didn't have a caste, and I didn't have a class, and I had no religion, no traditional blinkers, no traditional lenses on my spectacles, which are very hard to shrug off...So don't mess with me."

~ Arundhati Roy, Writer and Distinguished Introducer to Dr Ambedkar's AoC, in a 2007 interview[28].

As Karthik Navayan, a human rights activist, says, 'we are not going to demand a ban on the book' nor 'burn the book'. The objectives, broadly, of the protests against the new 'annotated critical edition' of Babasaheb Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, introduced by Arundhati Roy, have been to question the efforts at appropriation of this inestimable resource of anti-caste knowledge and its commercialization through deploying a writer who doesn't have any record of engaging with caste, especially its structural aspects, in her more than two decades long writing career. As is evident from earlier articles on *Round Table India*, no demands for imposition of any kind of curbs on the book were ever made – so where do these 'protests' against the protests stem from? Please read a few of them below.

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"Controversy is brewing over author and social activist Arundhati Roy's visit to Hyderabad on Sunday to mark the launch of an annotated edition of B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*. A section of Dalit activists from the city are demanding a ban on the book and are planning protests at the launch venues."

~ The Hindu. Hyderabad: March 7, 2014

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28 Barsamian, David. Interview with Arundhati Roy. *The Progressive*, February 2007.

"Of course I've several issues. Also with how the entire 'debate' is being conducted online—where AR and I are being held responsible for all rapes, murders of Dalits".

~ *S. Anand, Publisher, Navayana.*

"I was in Hyderabad recently and was seriously appalled to hear that Arundhati's piece is apparently being construed by some as being demeaning of Ambedkar and 'devoting more space to Gandhi'. If this is indeed the nature of the criticism that is being made the pretext for the denial of permission, it is a travesty of reason and a deliberate, mischievous misreading of her article, not much unlike the Hindutvavadi's misreading of Doniger."

~ *Kavita Krishnan, Member, Central Committee, CPI (ML) - Liberation.*

"Dalit intellectuals think it is their right, by virtue of their caste, to decide whether a Maoist sympathiser can write on Ambedkar; whether one can write on the Ambedkar debate with Gandhi; or whether one is allowed to write more words in criticism of Gandhi than in praise of Ambedkar. The (sic) *Annihilation of Caste* was written for the upper castes, meant to be addressed to them."

~ *Shivam Vij, Associate Editor at Scroll.in*

"What, may I ask, about Arundhati Roy brings out the most vicious language of the mouths of desi men? Little else seems to produce a public outpouring of masculine rage, jealousy, anxieties, and even threats of violence than a Roy essay today."

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"No matter how far one tries to hide beneath progressive labels, the deep-seated misogyny against Roy is palpable. Why should she speak? What are her credentials? How can she enter our space? How dare she? Who does she think she is? I at least am glad she's around to ruffle many different feathers and puncture several male egos."

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"Any thoughts over the current silence on Devyani Khobragade now that her husband has been accommodated in JNU and her children have been discovered to be citizens of two countries? What next? Bharat Ratna?"

~ Uday Chandra, Researcher, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen, Germany.

"Identity politics of any kind, be it Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Dalit, Caste based or Ethnicity based or Nationalist (of any variety), can never be good news for the freedom of expression or enquiry. The politics that glamorizes victimhood, injured honour and sentiment is antithetical to a politics fashioned out of intelligence, sanity, liberty and ethics".

~ Shuddhabrata Sengupta, media practitioner.

"Those hoping to hear acclaimed author Arundhati Roy speak, were in for a big disappointment. Fearing "backlash from right wing activists and caste-based groups," the organisers decided to call off the event featuring the controversial author at the nth hour on Sunday".

~ Times of India. March 10, 2014.

"Have not read her essay yet, But with all the historical revisionism that we see lately, of authors who pretend to reconcile Ambedkar and Gandhi , it is great time for an authentic deghettoisation of Ambedkar to happen. Not one that would sanitize Ambedkar and downplay his criticism in order to make him fit to the nationalist vulgate, but one that really engages with his critique seriously in order for a revolution of thought to happen. So we definitely need more Arundhatis, Perry Andersons and Navayanas! Now the problem is, how does this connect to the Dalit movement and Dalit intellectuals?

The Dalit movement has developed a ghettoized culture, and certain stakes in it, precisely because of the historical experience of the harm done by false friends like Gandhi. Of people who take up their cause but

refuse to engage with their ideas and give credit to their politics. There is nevertheless a real problem with the appropriation of Ambedkar by the intelligentsia, which will surely antagonize those who have dedicated their activism to keep his memory and thoughts alive for almost 6 decades - if they are made to feel dispossessed. But there are plenty of possibilities also for this connection to happen and for a new politics of change to emerge around the anti caste struggle."

~ *Nicolas Jaoul, Anthropologist.*

"Murdering the innocent to advance an ideology is wrong every time everywhere"

~ *George W. Bush, Statesman.*

Disclaimer: Most of these quotes were made in public spaces like Facebook and twitter and are either by Brahmin or savarna intellectuals, writers etc. Most contain grave factual errors. The last quote is by the former President of the United States of America.

Hatred in the belly

~ Joopaka Subhadra

(Recorded by Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes)

Joopaka Subhadra, poet, writer, and women's rights activist, was one of the key speakers at the **'Democratic Debate on Appropriation of Ambedkar's Writings'** *held on April 10, 2014, in Hyderabad. The following text features her intervention [29] at the debate.*

180 pages. When I read that, what I felt was, she had been hoarding up a heap of all kinds of news stories. Is there such a need? She talks about Malala, in the very beginning, and so on. Instead of talking about matters related to annihilation of caste, her efforts actually increase the intensity of pain caused by caste. *Our pain*. Only if you are an untouchable will you understand that pain.

'*Don't come close to me, stay far away*'. When they pour drinking water for you from a distance saying, *stay away*! That pain is of many kinds. In the villages, it is direct, naked, in cities, it is polished, clothed. In the villages, you've *sakali* (dhobi) doctors and *mangali* (barber) teachers. Whether they are doctors or teachers, whatever they might be, for them there is only caste.

This pain.... She is not a Christian, she's a Brahmin. Her father is a Brahmin, mother is a Syrian Christian. What does she say, 'why should I not write?' Please write, but write by trying to understand these pains, engage with these pains. But..don't write to trivialise and humiliate our pains.

When we look at this book, as soon as I saw the image on the cover I was very surprised. When the excerpts appeared in *Andhra Jyothy*. I have never seen Ambedkar's image like this. You'll understand what kind of *hatred they nurse in their bellies* when you look at this picture. You will understand clearly when you look at this picture!

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29 *Dalitcamera Ambedkar.* Joopaka Subhadra: Arundhati Roy doesnt know what Caste pain is about. Published on April 10, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjD6u3qQswo (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

Amebdkar's pictures evoke in us the image of a very sophisticated, well-groomed person, wearing neat spectacles and smart suits. That is the kind of impressive images of Ambedkar we are used to seeing. From where did they find this image for the book cover? Nobody has seen this image; don't remember seeing such an image ever, from my childhood till now. I haven't ever seen it. Where does this photograph come from?

Where did they find this photo, a photo that we could not find, how did they find it? Who gave it to them? There are so many posters, so many books, and so many photos in Maharashtra, all across the entire country. We see only his inspiring photos, smart suits, beautiful books. When he is perceived in this manner, how did they create this drawing, from which photo did they get this? Even his facial expression evokes helplessness.

Does Ambedkar look pathetic? He exudes intelligence. Ambedkar's face exudes enormous dignity, intelligence, self-confidence and inner strength. His face gives all those impressions. In such a scenario, how did they find this one, where did they scour and choose this one? How much hatred they must have in their bellies to pick this one and print? This picture itself is enough evidence of that! When I saw it in *Andhra Jyothy* itself I wondered, from where did they get this photo? It was right then that I understood (about the hatred).

Further she asks, why should we not write? Amma write, Ayya write. Tell the whole world about the caste system in this country. Write about caste discrimination, tell the whole world, but, engage with the pain, empathize with it and then talk about it. Talk about the intensity of the pain. Instead, the pain is trivialized, humilated and conveyed sarcastically. This is not the way it has to be conveyed, this is not the way the world should know about our pain. This is for us to articulate.

If the publisher had asked one of us, we would have written. Why has she been asked to write about annihilation of caste? It does not matter how big an intellectual she is, as Ilaiah said, it is not easy to grasp caste. And how does one talk about 'untouchability'? Only when one is an untouchable can one talk about it.

She says, 'didn't Ambedkar write on the Indian nation, as the chairman, didn't he draft the Constitution that applies to every citizen? Like that, I am also writing.' Please look at this, can anyone talk like this? She should understand the pain. What if we spoke in the same way?

Further, she seems to say, *I wrote about bomb blasts, wrote about dams, about globalization, am I a bomb technician? Am I a politician? I am not, but I still wrote (on those topics) and no one questioned me then. Why am I being questioned for this? Did we say anything about Ambedkar, he worked on the Constitution, on religions, on Hinduism, on Muslims, on Marxism; he wrote about the caste system in the whole country, about all castes, did we question him? Did we say, you're not one of us, and therefore, you can't write? Didn't we accept Ambedkar then?*

Is your situation and ours the same? Did we ever walk on the same path? Did we eat in one home? Is your food and mine the same? Are your clothes and mine the same? She says Dalits didn't wear clothes. Manu himself said, Dalits should not wear clothes...They should not wear gold, should use only iron ornaments. Who are you to tell us our history now?

She further says, about Gandhi, *can we say, only Gujarati banias should write about Gandhi? Gandhi has to be owned by everyone, right?* She claims, *the Hindu society in India doesn't know how Gandhi suppressed Ambedkar, I am revealing that, as no one else has done it.* She says this very proudly. Who does not know this? Everyone knows how Gandhi suppressed Ambedkar.

If we look at the introduction, talking of annihilation of caste, she doesn't speak of what should the country do, what should the Dalits do, what should all these castes do? She says *low is privileged as compared with the lower.* Meaning everyone is benefiting from the caste system, no one wants the system to go. But for us, it has to go.

This caste has to go, it is because of caste that we have become slaves. It is because of caste that we sweep the roads, it is because of caste that we have to do manual scavenging. It is because of caste that we are denied education; it is because of caste that we don't have jobs; it is because of caste, we don't have civil rights.

All of this is experienced by us. We suffer. Whatever may be your knowledge, you could be the fifth ranking intellectual in the world, but in India, it is clear that you don't have the knowledge to grasp caste and tell the world about it. Arundhati Roy does not have it because she's not a Dalit, as she herself says: *I am a Brahmin, my father is a Brahmin.*

'My mother is a Syrian Christian', she says. Syrian Christian means Brahmin. So what she is declaring is, *anyone can write. I have worked a lot for Dalit movements, I have the right. I worked to write about the nature of Indian society, have worked in movements, even I want caste to go.* Another thing that she says, *people have written, they will write, we will write, more people will write, what I have written is correct.*

All that is fine, but her mode of engagingwith the subject is not good. It seems to express cruel sympathy. When she talks about Ambedkar, this cruel sympathy comes through. This, we don't want. This kind of sympathy we don't need. Caste has to go, work with the Dalit intellectuals, the pain has to be expressed through them in their own voices. And the intellectual resources to combat caste, to annihilate caste have to be developed.

So, I came here to share my views, I am grateful for this opportunity. Brother (Karthik Navayan) had said, there is limited time for speakers, I have kept to that. But there is a lot to talk, there is a need to talk until caste is annihilated (laughs). This is a saga that won't end until caste does. To my friends who organized this, thank you, Jai Bhim.

Translated from Telugu by **Anu Ramdas**.

Resisting a messiah

~ Anoop Kumar

The (Jat-Pat-Todak) Mandal may be asked to explain why it has disobeyed the Shastric injunction in selecting the President. According to the Shastras the Brahmin is appointed to be the Guru for the three Varnas; varnanam bramhano guru, is a direction of the Shastras. The Mandal therefore knows from whom a Hindu should take his lessons and from whom he should not. The Shastras do not permit a Hindu to accept any one as his Guru merely because he is well versed. This is made very clear by Ramdas, a Brahmin saint from Maharashtra, who is alleged to have inspired Shivaji to establish a Hindu Raj. In his Dasbodh, a socio-politico-religious treatise in Marathi verse Ramdas asks, addressing the Hindus, can we accept an Antyaja to be our Guru because he is a Pandit (i.e. learned) and gives an answer in the negative. What replies to give to these questions is a matter which I must leave to the Mandal. The Mandal knows best the reasons which led it to travel to Bombay to select a president, to fix upon a man so repugnant to the Hindus and to descend so low in the scale as to select an Antyaja— an untouchable—to address an audience of the Savarnas. As for myself you will allow me to say that I have accepted the invitation much against my will and also against the will of many of my fellow untouchables. I know that the Hindus are sick of me. I know that I am not a persona grata with them. Knowing all this I have deliberately kept myself away from them. I have no desire to inflict myself upon them. I have been giving expression to my views from my own platform. This has already caused a great deal of heartburning and irritation. I have no desire to ascend the platform of the Hindus to do within their sight what I have been doing within their hearing. If I am here it is because of your choice and not because of my wish.

~ Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

No, I have not read Ms Roy's essay. I have even very consciously avoided reading her quotes from the essay put up by my various Dalit friends on FB, ripping her essay apart. I will read her but not so early. Will read her at my own pace. I do not miss anything on caste, whatever I can lay my

hands on. Have even listened to Subramanian Swamy's 'introduction' of Ambedkar for his followers with great relish. So will read her too for sure.

I do not want to lose my focus here, do not want to fall in the trap laid by her various promoters who are very arrogantly suggesting to me to 'first read her essay and then prove whether she has done justice to Ambedkar or not' on how wrong I am in calling her anti-Dalit.

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In none of my rants did I suggest that it is about her essay actually. I do not care what she has written on Ambedkar or on anything else that she wrote about in her essay. My rants are about something else. My rants are about what she actually represents before us, not as a person, but as someone who simultaneously gets two national magazines (*Outlook, Carvan*), one national newspaper (*The Hindu*), international media (*The New York Times, The Huffington Post*) to provide her ample space - to talk about her essay, about caste, about Dalits, about Ambedkar - which is so cruelly denied to us, is shut for ever. Not even Ambedkar could ever breach it, till he got discovered by people like Ms Roy.

Closely related to what she represents to us is another issue of the whole politics of her introducing Ambedkar's seminal text to the world, to upper castes, to western world as has been continuously professed by her publisher and his friends - both *desis* and whites- telling me in no uncertain terms that this publication is actually not meant for me, for Dalits, for all those who "know their Ambedkar" but for upper castes who have refused to read him and for western academia who are yet to discover Ambedkar.

You (Roy) introducing him will make them all read more about Ambedkar, they say.

And they are accusing me of wrongly calling you a messiah!

You are already a messiah, Ms Roy!

Declared and accepted by many, by all those who actually matter in this country. It is not for nothing that national and international media provide you so much space on issues they care two hoots about. What is it, if not the ardent belief of your followers in your miraculous power to make people read something that they have avoided their entire lives?

And like what happens with every messiah, you already have very cunning followers who are quoting your messiah status for their private gains, cheating gullible masses who believe in your messiah-ness.

I am merely resisting your messiah status now being thrust on us. Just for the simple reason that it is more difficult to dislodge a messiah, a mahatma, than to create one. We spent some seven decades and enormous efforts in dislodging one, thrust on us quite forcefully, by others who also were as persuasive as you are today in claiming that it was only in our best interests.

But the truth was, as Babasaheb put it so poignantly in his discussion with Gandhi in 1931: "history tells that mahatmas, like fleeting phantoms, raise dust but raise no level".[30]

However, I am fighting a losing battle actually. It has already been won by others.

30 Keer, Dhananjay. Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission. *Popular Prakashan*, 1971.

Arundhati Roy failed to grasp the significance of *AoC*

~ Dr K. Satyanarayana

(Recorded by Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes)

On the occasion of 123rd Birth Anniversary of B. R. Ambedkar, Dalit Adivasi Bahujan Minority Students' Association (DABMSA) organized a seminar under the title "Celebrating Ambedkar: The Relevance of "Annihilation of Caste" Today". *Dr Satyanarayana of EFLU shared his views on the controversy around Navayana's edition of* Annihilation of Caste. *The following is a transcript of his speech.*[31]

Already a lot of ground has been covered by the earlier speeches, especially the ones by Gopal Guru and Tharakam garu, with regard to this particular controversy. The level of debate has been raised to such a height, especially thanks to Gopal Guru who raised certain issues, partly because he has been working on a book called *Ethics of Representation,* which is mainly on Ambedkar and we are looking forward to that book. …

Since I have been following this entire discussion around Ambedkar, I would like to locate this whole discussion in the context of the last 10 years or so, with the rise of the social media and the Internet. With the rise of what some have categorized as "Internet Dalits", which collectively refers to a number of important Dalit scholars, intellectuals and activists who are really vigilant and active. They won't let anything go without a comment. I think this has created a serious kind of problem for the mainstream. Of course, you have intellectuals like Gopal Guru, Srinivasulu garu and Tharakam garu (other speakers at the seminar) and others but you also have these "Internet Dalits" who are there all the time in the internet and are ready to comment and respond to these kinds of issues.

You have seen the earlier controversy about the NCERT textbook (with the Ambedkar cartoon). The central issue in the case of that controversy

31 *Dalitcamera Ambedkar*. Dr K. Satyanarayana: "Arundhati Roy failed to grasp the significance of *Annihilation of Caste*". Published on 19 April, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52VLgzrdZUc (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

was the issue of representation of Ambedkar. What kind of a lesson had been written about Ambedkar? The argument was that even though you are secular, democratic and modern intellectuals, you have no sense of Ambedkar. You have not followed or understood Ambedkar. So they were very upset. In fact, they raised a question where they started attacking not the argument, but resorted to stereotyping Dalit intellectuals and academics and also not granting them a status where they have a right to express their opinion. So they were basically saying that these (Dalit activists and intellectuals) are all fundamentalists and are like the *Hindutvavaadis* who do not allow any democracy.

Surprisingly, it is the same 'secular intellectuals' who have practised all this: this exclusion, not allowing any discussion of Ambedkar, not including Ambedkar (in curriculum). Dalit activists and intellectuals asked the same questions of these very people and said, *you are so fascist and undemocratic that you don't allow any discussion*. But the secular, democratic intellectuals of Delhi, who were part of NCERT, did not answer these questions, instead they responded with: *you have no right to ask these questions.* I was really surprised by this.

I was really upset when this happened. And, at that time the entire media was supporting them. This was the time when we first saw the power of social media. In fact, a small interview with *Dalit Camera* could create a lot of discussion around this and our point of view could be put forward: that there are other people, not only this specific set of intellectuals, who can do the same kind of reasoning and discussion as they do.

The key points that Gopal Guru has put before us now are: "discursive rationality" and "discursive ethics". These are the two principles around which you have to conduct a discussion so that various people can put forward their views through an open discussion.

Similarly, when Ashis Nandy made his comment, "SC/STs are the most corrupt people in this country", there were discussions about whether the statement was objectionable? Why was such a statement made? How could academics make such arguments and what kind of punishment should be delivered to Nandy for making such a statement? At that time, if you had watched the national media channels like *NDTV* and *Star TV* -

they gave space to Nandy to speak in a prime slot so that he could counter the arguments made against him. Thus aiding him to justify what he had said. This way, a majority of secular democratic intellectuals had felt that what Nandy had said was not objectionable. A number of articles had been written and a number of arguments were made against Nandy, especially on *Round Table India*. What I found amazing in that entire debate was the immense energy of the emerging Dalit intellectual group. This was something very fascinating in that disappointing situation.

In this particular controversy around Navayana's "*Annihilation of Caste*", a similar debate also occurred, particularly through social media and *Dalit Camera*. And here again I am surprised, in this discussion, there was a certain way in which they responded. As a teacher I teach this text, *Annihilation of Caste*, so I have certain views about it and a particular kind of sensibility. Gopal Guru was referring to it, asking, "why did that meeting at Jat Pat Todak Mandal fail"? That meeting was for caste Hindus, and Ambedkar was supposed to be the chairperson, but it failed. So Ambedkar made the observation that the relationship between the Hindu and the untouchable is a tragic relationship and it has to fail in the same manner. And in fact, I thought that this discussion between Arundhati Roy and the Dalit intellectuals, and this publisher who has professed to be a part of the anti-caste campaign, would touch new levels and there would be some fruitful results. But, obviously, it has taken the same, familiar kind of a route.

One of the most disappointing things in all this was the way Arundhati Roy responded. In fact, I am reminded of one of the important controversies of our times - that of Rushdie's. When Salman Rushdie wrote "Satanic Verses", Susie Tharu was using Rushdie's texts and speeches in the class because Rushdie was such a radical intellectual and in his first novel, he was criticizing Emergency and Sanjay Gandhi. And he was also pro-Third World. He was a Third World spokesperson and sometimes a Marxist and so on. When "Satanic Verses" became a controversy and the Muslims across the world were upset, my friend's opinion was that if Rushdie had any sense and any commitment to the Third World and to all that he lived by, then he should have immediately withdrawn the book. Otherwise, that would be the end of Rushdie. In fact, I think that it was indeed the end of Rushdie in a political sense. He had to be protected by the

police, the security agencies; he had to be "caged" in the west, he was lost permanently to the west. So, that was the tragedy. Similarly, when I saw Arundhati Roy's response, I thought that she is permanently lost to the people of this country because she has no sense of how to respond to this kind of a controversy.

One argument they have all advanced, a very familiar argument: that Ambedkar belongs to all of us. Recently there was also some article in *The Hindu* talking about Modi garlanding Ambedkar. Someone even said that Ambedkar is important if you want to understand the foundations of India's modernity. This is what we have always been saying but you have been ignoring it all along. You have said that 'Dalits are practicing exceptionalism'. In fact, it is the other way round, you have been supporting exceptionalism and you have suppressed Ambedkar's thought. Ambedkar's memories were kept alive by these small journals, small booklets and it is Dalits who have preserved his memory and who have forever argued that he is an important intellectual for this country, especially if you think in terms of revolution. But you have never taken this suggestion.

If you actually have time to investigate the history of "*Annihilation of Caste*" – how it was published, how it was suppressed, how it was not allowed – it is clear who suppressed it and who made him an untouchable. And today you are saying that Ambedkar is for everybody? I am really surprised and suspicious of such an act. This is where a lot of Dalits also grew suspicious. They did not trust the argument that said – "*Annihilation of Caste* is actually addressed to (savarna) Hindus, so it belongs to us."...

There are many ways in which they misunderstand, and totally misinterpret many arguments. If we say that we have objections, they say, "You have to be happy because Arundhati Roy has written it." So we cannot be critical, we cannot refuse to engage, we cannot disagree, we are only allowed to be happy. So the response of the Dalits has already been set in place. You have to respond in ways that they expect you to. Even diversity of voices is not allowed. In this kind of a context, we ask, why are you bringing in Gandhi when you talk about Ambedkar?

So, when they say that Dalits are saying that *read Ambedkar ahistorically, do not place him in a context, do not place him in history, and do not place him among his peers and contemporaries,* then does that mean that the Dalits are so ignorant that they don't want you to read it through a particular context? Is this the argument that Dalits are making? This is not what Dalits are saying. This is what you are making up.

So Roy's argument is that if you have to read it in a historical manner, then you have to read Ambedkar with Gandhi. Some of these people who do this kind of work should actually have a sense of self-critique. You should wait and ask yourself "is there anything wrong?" If you want to serve a particular group of people and the same sections have objections, then you have to think twice about it, only then you might understand so many things by yourself. One of the questions that you need to ask yourself is, "in what way am I casteist?" Or "in what ways am I reinforcing caste?"

In one of her replies, she says that, "*Annihilation of Caste* got published in so many newspapers." What has been circulated in many newspapers? Excerpts from the introduction written by you and nothing from *Annihilation of Caste*. Not even a single paragraph. Is this not because of the fact that you are a famous writer hailing from a Malayali Syrian Christian background with certain kind of inherited access to privileges? Do you not know that the space that you occupy in the media is not available to any Dalits? While for Dalits to voice their opinions there are only these alternative social media forums as no space is provided to them in the mainstream media platforms.

Recently, *The Hindu* newspaper authorities sent out a circular to their employees stating that they shall not be allowed to bring non-vegetarian food to their office canteen. Nobody published this, not even a single English newspaper. The employees of the organization had to call up *Dalit Camera* and ask them to do something about it as they were feeling helpless. They could not publish it in their own newspaper and or in any other newspaper. So don't you know that your (Roy and secular democratic intellectuals) power position is all-pervasive? And that is why you could do this?

Now about the Gandhi context. What is the Gandhi context? We are not saying that you read Ambedkar in an ahistorical manner. We are saying that there is a particular history to this text, some significance and so on. But if you look at the academic scholarship on Ambedkar in the social sciencies and the humanities, it is such a shoddy, poor body of work. Especially in the last 10 years what we see most is 'representative scholarship'. In every book you have to have a small chapter, something on Ambedkar. Like, if you are writing a book about political thought, you have to have one chapter. So these guys catch hold of someone and make him write something on Ambedkar. But there is no substantial book on Ambedkar's thought. I hope that Gopal Guru's book will change the scene.

There is this book on the Kannada Dalit movement by D. R. Nagaraj, and one chapter in it is on Gandhi and Ambedkar. And the thesis in the book is that Ambedkar is western educated, liberal and therefore governmental. And on the other hand he talks about Gandhi as spiritual, philosophical and therefore liberatory. Of course, I am summarizing the argument crudely, but he almost argues as if Gandhi has a civilizational mission whereas Dalits have no civilizational mission. So this is the problem. It is not like we do not want to historicize, but when you historicize, you have a purpose. Otherwise why would someone argue like that in a book on the Dalit movement?

There is also this book by Valerian Rodrigues. It is a collection of writings by Ambedkar which have been put together in one book with an introduction by Rodrigues. When you read this introduction, you will find one paragraph on Gandhian indoctrinations. When I reviewed that section and objected to it, he was very upset. When he came here, many people asked Valerian, *why did he do it?* He was again very upset. Rodrigues' argument was that Ambedkar is as great as Gandhi. As if you have these two great sons of this country, both of whom fought against untouchability. As if both of them were for *swaraj* and independence. This is such a simplistic kind of reading. They don't even quote Ambedkar, they don't even quote Gandhi on caste and untouchability. If they quote, they would really understand, but they don't quote.

As a matter of fact, Valerian has a piece on Ambedkarin *EPW*,[32] take a look at it. The way they build up Gandhi is basically by not quoting what he actually said. They don't quote Gandhi, instead they only create a mythology of Gandhi. This is a real academic strategy. Similarly, a counter-mythology is also created and Ambedkar seems to be placed at the other end as if he has no civilizational mission. I think this paradigm has to be set aside. If you really want to understand Dalits, you have to come from a completely different route. The thing is that you do not want to give up this paradigm and yet you want to claim that Ambedkar belongs to all or that Ambedkar is as great as Gandhi. This is the problem, the problem of representing Ambedkar. As previously mentioned by Tharakam garu, *Annihilation of Caste* does not need an introduction. It is a widely read text. Besides that, this introduction is bad and it has made Dalits very angry.

The other point is that, if today you want to write about Ambedkar then there are already a number of scholars who have researched about him. One could compare this with, say, if today you want to write an anthology of feminist literature, would you go to a prominent male person and ask him to write an anthology for women? If you were to look into the history of Black thought, who would you go to? Would you not be going to a black intellectual? This is such a simple question, yet they do not understand this.

They seem to think that this is an illogical argument. I am sure the introduction would have been entirely different if it were written by a Dalit intellectual. You have no sensitivity to understand this. I can understand that you did not realize before publishing but once you understood, you should have withdrawn. Yet, you didn't. This is what I find really astounding. And then you go on defending it and justifying your argument and continuously try to nullify Dalits' arguments.

Our agenda is not to attack Roy or anybody else but rather to save Ambedkarite thought from people like Ananya Vajpeyi, Modi, Arundhati Roy and other such kinds of people who want to appropriate Ambedkar; who are saying that Ambedkar belongs to all. The reason why this

32 Rodrigues, Valerian. Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate.Vol - XLVI No. 02, *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 08, 2011.

discussion became so acrimonious is because Arundhati Roy has such an uncritical fan following, people who definitely do not have any interest in Dalits. They merely want to create a ruckus.

Today we have the presence of a strong intellectual group and we won't allow any kind of appropriation. We don't have to burn books or do anything of that order since we can handle it on an intellectual plane. Like Gopal Guru said, discursive rationality is enough. Let them come for a meeting; we have our questions and arguments ready. Appropriation is a difficult task now. We want them to grant that Dalits are thinking beings and we have the right to challenge. They should not think that Dalits should be grateful because they (secular, liberal intellectuals and academicians) have done something for us. If we understand the objections raised by Dalits, then we shall see that the argument has acquired a different level of sophistication that attacks the more subtle forms of casteism.

To expect that just because Roy has written an introduction for *AoC*, we should be grateful and fall at her feet, that stage is gone. So now there is the next stage where we want to talk to her and discuss whether we like her introduction or not. We want the argument at that level; you have to treat us at that level. Now, you can no more get away by saying *'I have done this so you should be happy and thankful.'* You have to rather throw away your introduction. You cannot get away by saying, "this is my introduction, and you write your own."

In terms of reading *AoC* and Ambedkar, it is a difficult task. You need to invest a lot to be able to grasp the text because you really do not know how to engage with some of the areas unless you have been in the struggle. This is a genuine problem and as a matter of fact this is one of the reasons why for a long time I did not try and offer courses on Ambedkar because teaching can be a difficult task. I have only offered courses on Ambedkar twice so far. This is because it is genuinely difficult to teach Ambedkar.

There are already so many ways of looking at the text so it can often be really difficult to understand it in the proper context. You cannot make final statements about it the way Arundhati Roy has made. You can't make statements like "Ambedkar was anti/pro development", "Ambedkar was anti/pro Adivasi" etc. How can you make statements like that when you

have read only one text? And when somebody asked how she is qualified to write and make statements about the text like that, she replied, "I have taken the trouble to read it." Rubbish! You have taken the trouble to read it? You have only read it and nothing more. Do you think you have the right to assess Ambedkar by merely taking the trouble to read this one text? Just because you are a writer, does that mean you can comment on anything?

In the case of *AoC*, there are two things I want to note. You cannot say that Ambedkar had delivered a lecture attacking Hinduism of the old kind. The Hinduism that Ambedkar was addressing was the Hinduism that Gandhi had re-created and modernized for a modern India. In *AoC* the attack is not on the earlier forms of Hinduism, it rather attacks the modern Hinduism that has appropriated the Bhakti tradition as well as other folk traditions. Ambedkar in *AoC* attacks this modern form of Hinduism that has been appropriated by Gandhi for the modern state. When Ambedkar says, "I am not a Hindu" he was not saying it in the sense of whether his father was a Hindu or not. It is to be read as a move against Hinduism as propagated by Tilak and Gandhi, the kind of Hinduism that teaches varna. In that sense he was attacking Hinduism because we want equality. No one wants to be a slave.

So I am thinking that with the rise of Hindutva, the rise of Modi, if Ambedkar had not made this categorical statement, it would have been a disaster. Most of the Dalits and Bahujans would have been a part of that company. It is not that they are not there now, inclusive of the three Rams (Ram Vilas Paswan, Ramdas Athawale, Ram Raj). Ambedkar was able to present this in a very clear manner saying that there is no way to equality and democracy through Hinduism in the way you are presenting it. Whether there is a real Hinduism out there, whether there is a textual Hinduism, is another question. The Hinduism Gandhi was presenting offered no possibility of equality. Obviously, the question of equality and freedom is of central concern in Ambedkar's *AoC*. This was a historical contribution to the growth of democracy in this country.

The second point that I would like to raise is the difference between race and caste. Early scholars were trying to say that caste is race. Ambedkar strictly went against this and said that caste is a social division of people

of the same race. And in any case, he was totally opposed to any kind of race, caste or other discriminatory social division. Even though the race argument has been used very positively in Tamil Nadu in the Dravidian movement as well as during Phule's time, Ambedkar however out and out goes against the idea of equating race and caste. He said it's 'a social division and not a racial division.' Earlier, arguments were made linking caste to heredity and genes but Ambedkar strictly goes against such arguments. He did not want Dalits to follow a fascist racial argument. He wanted to fight caste on a social basis.

The third point is about caste. Gopal Guru was also commenting on this. *AoC* presents a theory of caste that has not been delved into much. Ambedkar provides a detailed theory about how a nation can't be built on caste, how caste is undemocratic and how it negatively affects Indian democracy. In fact, he makes a long list pointing out how caste has a negative impact on society, in terms of not allowing mobility, fraternity, federation, democratic community; it doesn't have a general public or general public space but only a caste based public. Caste is anti-social as it preaches hatred, divides people and supports hierarchy.

I think the more important argument he makes is that if you want any social improvement, it is not possible if you do not get rid of caste. For any social change, you need to mobilize people. If there is caste division, there is no possibility of mobilization. Like Ambedkar points out, each caste will have a "graded system of sovereignty". That implies that there is no possibility of mobilization, to unite, to fight. Caste promotes things like social boycott and excommunication. Ambedkar considered such measures as equivalent to death as there is no point living in a society without communication. Such a society can't be called a democratic society. So my point here is that, *AoC* is an important theoretical book on caste. Arundhati Roy is not able to point out a single theoretical issue from the book. So she has thoroughly failed in her introduction. Failing is one issue and not realizing and acknowledging it is another issue.

The Question of Free Speech

~ Vaibhav Wasnik

Human civilization has always been tied to the structures of power and control – over resources and people. To understand how this control is exercised, one has to unravel the dynamics of discourses in a society and study how those wielding power control them. The significance of rights, such as the right of free speech, has to be then seen and questioned through the prism of such controls in order to do justice to such a right.

Freedom of speech is an important right because the suppression of speech is equated with the suppression of ideas. Hence the adage, 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. Words expressing ideas have the potential to challenge and even change the dominant narratives enforced by the establishment with the aim of perpetuating delusions among the people. At least, that is the accepted wisdom behind the need to fight for such a right. Because if the fight for upholding this right is not seen in the correct perspective, then one could as well be promoting the right to propaganda as the right to free speech.

It is in this context that the entire business of Arundhati Roy's introduction to Navayana's edition of '*Annihilation of Caste*' has to be understood. India, just as any other country, has a dominant media and intelligentsia that control and manipulate public thought and opinion. Antithetical to their expected role and responsibility in a democracy they end up as organs promoting the dictates of the established power structures. Numerous examples from history clearly illustrate how the power of these organs of propaganda diverts the thinking of the people against their very interests.

The power structures in the Indian context are explicitly as well as implicitly engaged in the business of maintaining caste hierarchies that dominate Indian society. The explicit tactics used by these power structures are there for everyone to see and hence are not matters to be exposed or to be invested with deep analysis right now. However, the power structures that work under layers of sophistication, masquerading as 'well intentioned'

and pretending to promote the cause of justice for the victims of the caste order, are the ones that need careful scrutiny.

So, it is with these things in mind that some questions have to be asked: why the sudden need for the publication of a speech that is freely available? Why the need for a Brahmin owned publishing house to bring it out with an introduction by an upper caste writer? And all this accompanied by a flurry of rapid endorsements for the book through media outlets that have only been the bastions of the upper castes with no lower caste presence?

The people who promote this publication claim that it is a way to introduce Ambedkar to the upper castes. But then does this noble sounding claim have to be taken at face value? I mean, what is the actual need for this introduction? And does not this very introduction, through the pen of an upper caste writer, translate into the message that upper castes are to be seen as the sole authority on the introduced subject matter? Especially, when we take into consideration the fact that the media is in the business of promoting a specific narrative among the people? And so when you consider these facts, does it really seem like the voices opposing this introduction are "intolerant" people?

The popular saying goes: 'If you repeat a lie a thousand times it becomes the truth'. In today's world, this is put into practice by the mainstream media. Hence, whatever criticism or opposition one witnesses to this publication is not misplaced. It is clear that the critics are resisting the construction of idols such as Arundhati Roy to represent Ambedkar's thoughts. They are expressing their valid concerns and arguments against the attempted maligning of Ambedkar using the tools of a media and intelligentsia that are terribly biased against the lower castes. Therefore, their motivations for questioning this publication definitely do not represent an attack on the freedom of speech. On the contrary, the people bringing out the arguments of *freedom of speech* against the concerns of those opposing the Navayana edition completely overlook the fact that just as with any other right, freedom of speech definitely comes with the responsibility of working towards positive social change.

An introduction that alludes to an eventual problematic re-casting of, or possibly even maligning, an ideology through the medium of propaganda

organs such as mass media, definitely does not make for a responsible exercise of the right to speech. Instead of publishing a speech written for pre-independence India and commenting on it by bringing in another figure from the same era – Gandhi - wouldn't it have been wise to speak about the actual implications of the speech for today's generation? How about starting with criticizing the media outlets endorsing this introduction, instead of critiquing it, and for the absolute lack of lower caste representation in journalistic and editorial capacities in their ranks?

A well meaning intellectual would have easily perceived the intentions of the protestors and backed down by understanding that the true inheritors of Ambedkar's ideology are the Dalits who have preserved and promoted it. The valid opposition coming from these sections would have been reason enough to stop claiming to be a representative of Ambedkar, among upper castes or otherwise. The fact that the supposed intellectual is arrogantly stubborn in going ahead with the introduction puts her already dubious reputation as an honest intellectual under scrutiny. The only honesty in the entire debate has been the continued and rigorous protests against Navayana's edition of the speech.

Stigmatizing Dalits, From the Wadas to the Web

~ Nilesh Kumar

My father was fortunate that there was a government press just next to his work place. When a *presswala* got to know that my father is an ardent reader of Ambedkarite literature, he ensured that my father got a steady supply of such books. Once we had accumulated all this voluminous literature at home, my father insisted on my reading only two books vigorously –"*Buddha and his Dhamma*" and "*Annihilation of Caste*". I wondered if he was asking me to read them because they are our 'religious texts'. Around the same time, I also observed that a few of my Hindu friends were Gita readers. That made me take to the two texts recommended by my father, and I eventually read them quite a number of times.

The thing I want to convey here is that we were the carriers of these texts. Much like the many Buddhist monks who carried the Buddhist texts to safety, to the East and other places, during the Brahmin invasion when they were either being burnt or destroyed by the invaders.

There are similarities between the two cases. We have a stake in it; we were the soldiers who pulled the movement's chariot, loaded with texts, forward.

...And now we are the battlefield too.[33]

Academia is one of the many hegemonic power structures with which members of the marginalized have to struggle while hoping to get an education. In recent times, we have seen the academia being very prompt and blatant in coining labels for Dalits. The spectrum of adjectives used ranges from direct pathologising to patronising. Sample a few expletives that have originated from these spaces: 'Intolerant Dalits', 'Dalit fanatics', 'Dalit Misogynists' and 'Xenophobic Dalits' etc. The current label doing

33 From the Telugu poem '*nEnu*' by K.G. Satyamurthy (*Sivasagar*) translated by Kuffir. Sivasagar Kavitvam (1968-2008), edited by Gurram Seetaramulu. Published by *P. Annapurna*. September 2004.

the rounds is 'Dalit radicals'. There have been many earlier and there will be more in the future.

The origin, rapid dissemination and enforcement of such terms are always synchronised with some kind of resistance from Dalits. When Dalits object to a pedagogic misrepresentation of Ambedkar in the NCERT textbook[34] - look for 'Dalit fanatics', 'Foot soldiers of identity politics' and several more. Now when Dalits question the commercialization of Ambedkar's seminal text *Annihilation of Caste* (*AoC*) by the use of brand names such as Arundhati Roy, a new set of labels are afloat: 'Dalit radicals', 'Social Media Dalits' etc.

In this case, the labelling is being done to dismiss the protests against the Navayana edition of *AoC*. Among the several issues being raised in the protests, an important and crucial one is the non-engagement of the celebrity writer with the anti-caste movement.

The embattled community of Dalits is perpetually engaged in all manner of struggles. A fellow traveller in these anti-caste struggles would leave some imprints as an ally. During the period when Roy's career as a writer surged ahead, the country witnessed quite a few momentous anti-caste struggles - for example, the protests against the Khairlanji massacre that kept Maharashtra burning in a prolonged battle for justice. This massacre and protests did not happen in some distant past but in 2006, they occurred when Ms Roy was well known as an activist in the global arena. These protests do appear in her introduction to the *AoC*, but where was the voice of the introducer during these protests? As a left group says in its report:

As the Chief Minister was addressing a Cabinet meeting a group of about 50 women belonging to Dalit women's organizations including Urmila Pawar (a Dalit woman intellectual) managed to sneak into the Mantralaya and stormed into the office of the Chief Minister shouting slogans. Bandhs were observed in various towns and big villages in Bhandara and Gondia districts.

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34 Kumar, Anoop. The cartoon controversy: Inside the mind of one 'fanatic' Dalit – I. *Round Table India*, 19 May, 2012. Available at: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5130:inside-the-mind-of-one-fanatic-dalit-a-cartoon-controversy-i-&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

Pandharkawada and Yavatmal were also rocked by protests. Over 15, 000 people participated in a protest march in Chandrapur on 13 November. Then the protest spread to Amravati. On 14 November a morcha spontaneously planned turned into a mammoth march of 20,000 as the Dalits responded to the call in large numbers.[35]

Her phenomenal global reach was never extended towards any Dalit struggles; no article of hers appeared anywhere to show solidarity with the Dalits and draw the world's attention to them. This lack of engagement with anti-caste struggles forms the core of the questions the Dalits wanted to raise. And in response to their critical questions they are being pathologized by the publisher, members of the academia and their friends.

Since the introduction by A. Roy invokes the Khairlanji massacre and subsequent protests by Dalits, I want to register my contempt for the banality exhibited by the author and publisher in using one of the deepest wounds to the psyche of the untouchable community to market this book to the white and an apathetic upper caste audience. A. Roy urges readers to read Ambedkar's works if they have heard about Malala but not about Surekha Bhotmange. But beyond that I want to draw attention to how this commercial enterprise is continuing the stigmatization of the Dalit community for the act of protesting, be it for getting water and land rights or for displaying the 'potential' to raise questions about the book at its launch in Hyderabad.

Coming back to the protests against one of human history's most gruesome gang-rapes and massacres: please remember, the anti-rape protests in Delhi made it to international headlines but the Khairlanji protests were contained by the silence of the upper caste women's organizations, media and an unrelenting violent state reprisal. And it continues to be contained in the tepid prose of A. Roy; she seems oblivious of her role in silencing these protests. Her response to *Dalit Camera's* questions about being pathologized for expressing the most mundane of rights at a book launch – the right to participate in the Q and A section- is that the 'internet is an insult machine' where she is the most insulted person. This ought to have

35 Avanti. Khairlanji: Gruesome Massacre of Dalits: Dalit Fury Scorches Maharashtra. *People's March*, January 2007.

reminded the introducer and annotator of *Annihilation of Caste* of the stigmatization of at least the Khairlanji protesters. Read on:

"The police firing and death of one youth in Amravati sparked off further protests and led to an intensification of the agitation in other districts. People have been demanding the resignation of the Home Minister and the Chief Minister. The Home Minister had the gall to state in a function of the police in Pune that the agitation was being conducted in "Hitlerite fashion". As reports of this speech spread the Home Minister became a target of the people's protest. Sholapur exploded with protests and the police clamped curfew to stop the agitations. For over four days the curfew was on. Aurangabad went aflame and there too *lathi* charges, firing in the air could not control the people. Aurangabad was under curfew for several days. So also Pune."[36]

The excluded discriminating against the privileged is a myth

Another false allegation that was levelled by savarna/upper caste academics and supporters of Roy/Navayana was that Dalits were not allowing others to write on Ambedkar.

Now let us, for the sake of argument, assume that there is reverse discrimination happening. Say, a few Dalits are not allowing savarnas to write on Ambedkar and the freedom of speech of upper castes is being circumscribed. Anyone with a sound and rational mind can easily demolish these arguments if he/she understands the hierarchical structure of the society they live in, as well as the demographics of its diverse communities.

It is a widely known fact that Dalits have far less opportunities than others. In spite of that, I have never witnessed a Dalit denying space to any savarna researcher - right from colonial researchers to Indian savarnas like Srinivas to Beteille, to the Ivy League graduates or so-called intellectuals of today. It is therefore absurd on the part of some of these savarna researchers to say "subaltern subjectivity can never be excuse enough for intellectual bullying" (article in scroll.in), referring to the Dalit objections over the book. The savarna authors have neither the organic,

36 ibid.

experiential/empirical base nor any history of honest engagement to claim authority over the subject hence it cannot be called 'bullying' if Dalits point that out and call it 'epistemic violence'.

Similar to white people claiming reverse racist discrimination by African-Americans, it is a logical fallacy to even think that Dalits can discriminate or can 'stop' any savarnas from writing on Dalits or Ambedkar; being marginalized they can't raise their voice against the dominant on a level platform. Dalits have remained a 'subject' of study or research for savarnas. Dalits don't have the institutional power to oppress them. An individual Dalit abusing a savarna can be wrong because of his personal prejudice, but that cannot be equated to reverse discrimination. Racist and casteist discrimination is enabled by the combination of prejudice and power at all levels. The processes of discrimination are possible only for the privileged and not the underprivileged.

In the present scenario, the stigmatization of Dalits who wanted to ask questions at a book launch, or write their comments on Facebook is not being done by the 'Internet Hindus', some politicians or random persons on the Web. It is being enabled by the publisher and participants in the production of the book: that is, academics who have been cited in this book, and who are also aggressive promoters of the book along with their friends. They are the ones now labelling Dalits for showing the temerity to question, to raise objections. S Anand's latest label for Dalits is "Social Media Dalits".

I would like to end this essay with a question for the publisher of Navayana and others: scores of other books which were also introduced by non-Dalits did not evoke such protests from Dalits. Why?

Flaunting noble intentions, nurturing caste privileges

~ Asha Kowtal

My recent association with campaigns resisting violence[37] against Dalit women has brought me in contact with several individuals, groups and organisations that represent diverse perspectives and histories. Broadly, it includes groups that have been advocating 'gender justice' and others who have been battling the cruelty of the caste system in India. The reality is that these worldviews and ideological positions have greatly influenced the trajectories of collectives in this fight for justice - both for women and for communities that have been discriminated against for centuries. There is a difference between the two and can perhaps be understood with further nuanced reflections on their experiences.

Swimming in the murky waters that lie at the intersections of caste and patriarchy has been the biggest challenge for young Dalit women activists who are struggling to put an end to caste based gender violence, untouchability and all forms of discrimination. On one end of the spectrum, as women, we (hesitantly) look for allies amongst the men and women holding the banner for a gender-just world and on the other end of the spectrum we strongly associate with our own men folk and women in the anti-caste struggles.

During the National Tribunal - Violence against Dalit Women[38], scores of brothers, uncles and husbands of the Dalit women survivors of violence deposed before the jury sharing their experiences with the various barriers they faced in accessing justice. Since the incident/s of violence, many of them were threatened and intimidated by the upper caste perpetrators. Withstanding the severe pressure for compromise, they were still fighting

37 Kowtal, Asha. Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra. *Round Table India*, 19 February, 2014. http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7230%3Adalit-mahila-swabhiman-yatra&catid=119%3Afeature&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

38 Kowtal, Asha. National Tribunal - Violence Against Dalit Women. *Round Table India*, 28 September, 2013.http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6926:national-tribunal-violence-against-dalit-women&catid=129:events-and-activism&Itemid=195 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

for the rights of their own women. Fighting to restore the dignity and rights of the entire violated community.

As women involved in the planning and facilitation of this Tribunal, we learnt a lot. More than any textbook could ever teach us. We experienced the pain of a father who lost his livelihood and was living in fear, but who diligently keep following the legal process to seek justice for his daughter, a survivor of sexual violence. We shed tears and experienced the helplessness along with the husband of the Dalit woman who was paraded naked in her village. They poignantly said, '. . . swords and guns would be used to unleash violence and there would be bloodshed in our village if this had happened to a Rajput/Yadav woman. But since it was done to an untouchable woman ... we often weep together and console each other.'

We learnt that the cruelty of the caste system was borne by women and men from the community. We learnt that the force of caste violence is brutal on the bodies of women and men. The impact of that brutal force inflicted more pain . . . making our men folk cry in despair.

In the midst of this excruciating pain, young Dalit women continue to learn. We continue to learn from the experiences and from the words of elders from the community. We seek inspiration from them and engage in the struggle for freedom and dignity.

At several public forums and private discussions, we Dalit women are often told that Dalit men are perhaps more patriarchal, insensitive and inflict violence against women in their homes and community. These statements are usually made by men and women who are committed to work for advancement of women's rights and who are also recently engaged in research to study the patterns of 'internal violence'. In other words, this is to study domestic violence faced by 'Dalit' women. It is through projects like these that several upper caste women activists, professionals and writers have now begun to articulate with authority about violence against Dalit women.

This does not mean that Dalit men have fallen from the skies and are free from patriarchy. It does not mean that domestic violence is absent in Dalit homes. But the danger of the findings and analysis of studies conducted

by men and women from dominant castes, without engagement with the struggles of the community, is deeply damaging. It is with great ease that bedrooms of Dalit families can be used as a 'sample' in funded research to study and compare internal violence and external violence. It is a clear indication of the appropriation of community and personal experience to construct new knowledge and allied theory. Most of it very conspicuously avoids structural questions around the intersections of caste and patriarchy.

All of these new claims will soon result in books, articles, journal publications and research reports that attempt to theorize about Dalit women. All of these will be made available online and offline through various channels. *Outlook* and *The Hindu* and several others will be happy to publish full-length interviews and photo-shoots of the researchers in their fancy abodes.

Finally, when our young students google search 'violence + Dalit women' for their assignments and projects, they will find all of these reports and data analysis pointing to intimate partner violence (of course, as per the search request, Google will find data that is exclusive to Dalit women). How can we then expect our youngsters to situate the violence within the larger frame of caste hierarchies and exploitation? How can we expect them to study poverty-caste-gender and violence when the available literature and data is skewed?

It is not just the upper caste individuals who are under the scanner, but also the system created by their inherited privileges, which is the crux of the matter. It is this same Brahminical system that has held the reins of knowledge production throughout history and strives to continue to wield it, till date.

It is in this light that one has to face the persistent danger of introductions and annotated editions of Babasaheb's writings. This morning I googled '*Annihilation of Caste*' and the first on the list of results was an advertisement by Amazon.com selling Navayana's 'The Doctor and the Saint'. This is not the beginning of a conspiracy, or mere commercialization but just another cruel step in the long list of epistemic atrocities (that lead naturally to

real ones eventually) that we have endured for way too long. My fears are not unreal.

Therefore, it is plain and simple that flaunting noble intentions of studying 'caste' while nurturing upper caste privileges does not work too well together.

We want our children to know and understand Babasaheb independent of analysis by men and women who bear their own caste privileges and have no engagement with anti-caste feminist struggles. We continue to fight and resist as taught to us by our foremothers and fathers.

Our Dalit brothers are often branded as misogynist, our public protests are termed as mob fury/outrage, our articulations are made to seem worthless and our pain overlooked. As a community, we are used to this, since we have always been put under pressure to prove our 'merit'.

But, we have a legacy of ceaseless struggle of which we are the caravan-pullers. Jai Bhim!

Caste in the name of Christ: An angry note on the Syrian Christian Caste

~ Nidhin Shobhana

For many days now, I have been grappling with a strong sense of unrest within me. I am thankful to the recent debates on Arundhati Roy and her very long introduction to 'S. Anand's critically annotated *Annihilation of Caste*'. It inspired me to finally ventilate my unrest. Oops! I forgot to mention the real author's name, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. This is what big names like 'Arundhati Roy' do to you... you miss the real author's name![39]

Having acknowledged the inspiration, I would like to make it clear that this short essay is not about Arundhati Roy. It is addressed to my Syrian Christian brethren. It is an appeal to those Nazranis who strongly feel the need to write about caste.

People on the margins have constantly interrogated the 'speaker'. Savarna scholars more than often dismiss these interrogations as issues of 'authenticity'. You may find them saying, 'They have a problem with a Non-Dalit introducing a Dalit!' However, Dalit-Bahujan interrogations cover a gamut of issues. They question the privilege (Who is the speaker?), pedagogy (How does she speak?) and politics (Why is she speaking?) of the speaker.

These questions are forceful. They aim at transforming the act of speaking, reading and writing. In other words, it aims at transforming the process of knowledge production itself. They demand the necessary labour of self-reflection from the 'speaker'. They expose the distance between the speaker and her subject. They demand the speaker to understand her identity as relational, contextual and subjective. They highlight the value of listening.

My appeal contributes to this on-going forceful discussion on knowledge production.

39 A few months into the controversy, official websites of *Amazon* and *Verso* quoted Arundhati Roy as the co-author of *Annihilation of Caste*.

Having said that, it will be appropriate to start with an informed acknowledgement on where Syrian Christians stand in our caste society. A closer look at the community exposes caste, at least at three levels. Firstly, there is a caste hierarchy, which operates within them. By the late 19th and early 20th century, a few Syrian Christian denominations (Marthomites and Syrian Catholics) allowed Dalits and Backward Castes into their churches. They received differential and unequal treatment. Stories of these Dalit-Bahujan Syrian Christians are yet to be told. We may get back to those stories in a different essay. This essay aims at dissecting the well-bred Syrian Christian who is propertied, titled, has countless priests and bishops form his family, who can recollect every ancestor's name and game, whose favourite pastime is grabbing land, who fights for minority rights in universities but secretly wishes to buy off his Muslim or Dalit neighbor's property at a cheap rate, who may have a relative who watched 'Sound of Music' in the 1960s and so on and so forth. The common sense of Syrian Christianity is derived from this nobility. This common sense informs every Syrian Christian's sense of caste inequality and hierarchy. You see, it trickles down.

The common sense places them at the top of, what I call, 'The Christian Caste Hierarchy' (I would borrow from David Mosse[40] to argue that Caste provides the general characteristic of our society. Christianity should be seen as a mere influence/variable on the bedrock called caste). Now this is very clear, when we converse with them. A repeated mention of their Brahmin origins will often decorate the conversation.[41] In fact, economically well-to-do, aging Syrian Christians, will document such farfetched myths in their autobiographies.[42] One such little known Malayalam autobiography is of a deceased communist leader from my home district, Wayanad. In his autobiography, titled 'Cross and Sickle', he talks about the revolutionary transformations in his life. However, in the first three chapters, he painstakingly pulls the Brahmin thread from

40 Mosse, D. Caste and Christianity. *Seminar* (Vol. 633, pp. 58-63), (2012).

41 Abraham Tharakan in his blog posts (http://abrahamtharakanblog.blogspot.in/) glorifies the mythical Brahmanic origins of the community. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

42 K.George Varghese in his reflective article 'Writing Family Histories: Identity Construction among Syrian Christians' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 9 February 28 – 5 March, 2004, pp. 897-900) gives a sociological account of these *'Kudumba Charitram'* (Family Histories). He further mentions that an attempt in collecting them by Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR), Thiruvananthapuram, resulted in a stockpile of around 200 of them.

his ancestry.[43] I often wonder what would have been his thoughts about the 'other' Christian denominations, emerging from Dalit and Bahujan experiences.

Thirdly, in the general schema of caste they have been the chauffeurs of the Master Brahmins. They have operated as an important link, which connects Savarna pride with Avarna oppression.

In this process, they have constructed their own pride, which stands shamelessly on the avarna's toil. Now, in my limited knowledge, I have come across very few academic endeavours which talk directly about these caste ladders. It's indeed significant to state at this juncture that a rigorous Ambedkarite analysis and historiography of this powerful group is yet to come. However, when we read between the lines, we see the caste devil smiling sweetly.

Apart from white colonial scholars, broadly two other groups of writers have produced literature on Syrian Christians.The first group[44] claims to be engaged in passionate anthropological research, somewhat like the early ethnographers and orientalists. Under the garb of 'research for research's sake' they sanction and sanctify racist and casteist explanations of their existence. They sound apolitical. But do not get carried away so soon. By not talking about caste, its aesthetics, conflicts, oppression and slavery they uphold a unique identity which inspires awe. The second group[45] very clearly has a conservationist approach. They would like to 'preserve' this caste in all its colours. And while doing so they would make dangerous connections. For example, in a Malayalam book[46] I read recently, the author connects Syrian Christians with Kashmiri Pandits, Patels of Gujarat, Tamil Brahmins; Chitpavan Brahmins so on and so forth. His argument clearly states that all these groups have Jewish ancestry and have historically been arms of the ruling castes and classes. Now, can it

43 Comrade Varghese Vaidyar's Malayalam autobiography titled '*Kurushum Koitharivalum*' (Cross to Sickle). He was the first CPI (M) M.L.A. from Wayanad District.

44 This group include scholars like Susan Vishwanathan (*The Christians of Kerala*, 1991); A.M. Mundadan (*History of Christianity*, 1984), Juhanon Marthoma (*Christianity in India and a Brief History of Marthoma Church*, 2011) etc.

45 This group mainly includes Syrian Christians who (a) write their family histories (b) engage in academic work with a motive of glorifying Syrian Christian privileges.

46 Benhur, Abraham. The Jewish Christians of India: A Historical Study, *Jeevanist Books*, Kalpetta, 2012.

get more interesting! In yet another book titled 'Syrian Christians: Many faces, One Tradition', the author proudly states that Syrian Christians are *'Christians by Faith; Hindus by Culture and Oriental in their worship'*.[47]

This community has the highest average land ownership in the state of Kerala.[48] Scholars like Sunny Kapicadu, K.K. Kochu, Sanal Mohan, Kunnikuyi S. Mani and M. Kunhaman[49] shed light on the historical, social and economical aspects of Kerala's inequality. While doing so they directly or indirectly illuminate the kind of privileges Syrian Christians enjoy in Kerala.

For example, journalist and historian Kunnikuyi S. Mani and P. S. Anirudhanin in their book titled *'Mahatma Ayyankali: Ayyankaliyude Ariyapedathu Charitram'* give us a detailed account of how Syrian Christians violated Dalits' rights and grabbed their land. Through his political work, Ayyankali could convince the then government to grant Dalits land. He was successful in obtaining more than 500 acres of land. However, these government grants were mostly grabbed by Syrian Christians, who wanted to become 'the kings of high range areas', as Kunnikuyi puts it. The Syrian Christian land grab, often sanctioned by their Churches and policies of State is a common phenomenon in all high range areas of Kerala. Dalits and Adivasis have been the worst victims of their fencing.

Historically, this caste group developed into one of the major Bania business castes in Kerala. It is believed that they eventually displaced Buddhist and Jain traders who were challenging the Brahmanical Order. Under the happy patronage of the Master Brahmins,[50] this group enjoyed many privileges. There is evidence to prove that they had their own caste

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47 Paul, Dr Chacko M. Syrian Christians: One Tradition, Many Faces, *V. Joshi & Co.*, Pune, 2013.

48 Sunny M. Kappicadu in his essay 'Kerala Model: A Dalit Critique' quotes from a 2006 study conducted by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP). The study surveyed the average land holding of every caste/community. While Christians (Non-OBC) owned on an average 126 cent of land scheduled categories owned only 27 cent of land.

49 Kochu, K.K. Writing a History of Kerala: Seeking a Dalit Space; Kunhaman, M. Socio-Economic Development of Dalits in India: A Macro-Economic View; Mohan, Sanal. 'Narrativizing the history of Slave Suffering' in No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India, Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana (Ed.), *Penguin, New Delhi.*

50 The Masters of erstwhile Cochin Princely State were called the 'Protectors of Christians'. They had conferred Syrian Christians with many privileges. It is said that the King of Tirukochi called them 'Mapilla' (Mahapilla).

armies, they were given powers to control, exploit and oppress many 'lower castes', slave castes who served them. They were given greater spatial liberties. The knowledge of world trade and control over the cultivation and trade of cash crops proved a boon for this community. Christianity never witnessed a radical egalitarian interpretation in this community. *It was only when Christianity encountered slave castes and Dalits that the liberatory possibilities of the faith were actualized.*

The process of 'writing caste' for Syrian Christians should start with a detailed recovery of their own histories from anti-caste perspectives. This means that they should ask the following questions – (a) Beyond simply mentioning one's caste location, what does being a Syrian Christian mean. It is important to nail down and expose the identity politics of the powerful (b) How does one talk about one's privileges and hatred? (c) What are the contemporary manifestations of Syrian Christian racism and casteism? (d) How does one 'own' the dehumanizing privileges of caste? (e) How does one link the everyday of 'Syrian Christianhood' with communities above and below them in the caste hierarchy? (f) How does one forge dialogues, which threaten one's caste pride? I am sure my Syrian Christian sisters and brothers would add many more questions.

If this does not happen, and if Syrian Christians choose to be like the 'lengthy introducer' whom I mentioned in the beginning, they would keep repeating their caste-ordained role. *In the introduction, a Christian Bania talks about a Hindu Bania under the pretext of introducing Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.* In Tiru Kochi, until the early decades of the 20th century, if grains and oil were to be brought to a Namboothiri household by the lower castes, it had to travel through the Syrian Christian household. The traditional role of purification continues in the case of this introduction. An upper caste audience can consume a self-sufficient radical text only when a Syrian Christian performs the caste ordained purification ritual. Since they have the knowledge of world trade, they would even market the text. *This process is dangerous.*

If the images of caste continue in new forms, it would hurt all of us. If the Syrian Christian, armed with words, is waiting for the 'Dalit Revolution' so that she can encash it, we need to expose her. For them, 'Dalit' becomes an all-encompassing catchword to perplex caste. This should be challenged.

The urge to obsessively evaluate Dalits, their universal literature and their democratic social movements should be seen as an 'upper-caste indulgence'. *It should be 'engagement' and not 'evaluation'. This engagement should compulsorily implicate the speaker in the text. Borrowing from bell hooks*[51]*, a process of 'self-actualization'; an 'anti-caste self-actualization' should begin within the community.* It is my earnest request to all Syrian Christians and their friends to breathe freely, open their own rooms, and clean up the dirt. This work would be historic!

51 bell hooks in 'Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom' (1994) talks about self-actualization as an important component of engaged pedagogy.

The Not-So-Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Erasure of the Self Under Casteism

~ Gee Imaan Semmalar

"In my judgment, it is useless to make a distinction between the secular Brahmins and priestly Brahmins. Both are kith and kin. They are two arms of the same body, and one is bound to fight for the existence of the other." ~ **Babasaheb Ambedkar,** *Annihilation of Caste, 1936.*

Babasaheb Ambedkar, with characteristic foresight has already called the bluff. The bluff of the secular activist, the casteless writer, the anti-caste, Brahmin publisher. Anything that I write will pale in comparison to the clarity of thought, the depth of understanding, the political knowledge of just that one quote of his and I would not in my wildest, most arrogant moment even attempt to make such a comparison. I would like to, at the very outset list out my identities, because I believe in the power of self-representational identity politics. Savarna born. Fledgling Ambedkarite by choice. Transman. Anti-national with no citizenship rights at the moment. Atheist. This is my avial of privileges and "authentic victim" status.

I thought about whether it is appropriate for me to write at this juncture. After consulting dalit friends and intellectuals about what they thought politically, I feel compelled to, for several reasons. To make this more than a debate between fanatic dalit voices and conscientious savarna ones, to make the point that this debate is not savarna vs dalit. But between Ambedkarites resisting the attempt at cultural and intellectual appropriation of Babasaheb and "secular", civil society activists attempting to, advertently or inadvertently, intelligently or stupidly, cunningly or naively to do just that.

I have heard in several spaces savarna people making the argument that dalits and their supporters are too quick to judge, we haven't even read Arundhati Roy's introduction. Reading or not reading is not the point. For the mass of dalit-bahujans who hold Babasaheb so dearly, the world of letters is still a distant dream. They bring their dear Babasaheb alive through stories that are told to their children as they sleep hungry at

night, through songs that are sung about the might of Bhim, through pictures that are drawn with charcoal on cracked walls. Will you ever be able to take that Bhim to your savarna readership? All your attempts at appropriation will fail because that is where he resides - in the hearts, actions, politics and lives of Ambedkarites.

"I have never hankered for publicity, and if I may say so, I have more of it than I wish or need" ~ A reply to the Mahatma by Dr Ambedkar, appendix of AOC

I saw photos of the book launch at India Habitat Centre. Babasaheb looks scornfully from the background at the proceedings. Arundhati Roy is too busy signing copies of his treatise against her to notice. Anand, the publisher, is too busy bringing Dr Ambedkar to the India Habitat Centre audience to notice. It was with great sadness and rage that I saw the violence done to a great leader who very clearly said in his own introduction to the same text, "I have no desire to ascend the platform of the Hindus, to do within their sight what I have been doing within their hearing". So what is the purpose of Arundhati Roy's introduction, longer than the actual text of Dr Ambedkar's speech, the publisher's annotations, the multi-city launches, the interviews, the signing of copies, the posturing, the posing?

What political need is there to forcefully and violently bring Gandhi to the introduction when in the original text, he was placed in the appendix by Dr Ambedkar himself? What is the need to title an introduction as "The Doctor and the Saint" instead of just calling it an "Introduction"? What is the need to tempt, seduce, cajole, trick savarna readership into buying Annihilation of Caste when it has been in print since 1936 in different Indian languages for a fraction of the cost? What is the need for a savarna writer introducing and making more palatable to a savarna readership, a seminal text written about the destruction of the caste system? Is the Navayana edition of an untouchable text written by an "untouchable" being made touchable for savarna readership through the mediation of a touchable introduction by a touchable, booker prize winning star? If for 80 years, savarna readership has ignored this treatise written against them by the greatest leader of modern India, the first law minister of independent India, the man behind drafting the Constitution, political

thinker par excellence, awe inspiring social commentator, passionate learner and teacher of the masses for the sole reason that he was dalit, the loss is theirs. They needn't "take the trouble", like Roy has, to read him. They also needn't take the trouble to make use of any of their constitutional rights either, since the constitution was also drafted by the same dalit leader whose texts are untouchable to you without savarna mediation.

Really, if Arundhati Roy really thinks she took "the trouble" to read him, I wish she hadn't. She doesn't have the humility, the political sense to realise she has done nobody but herself a favour by reading him. The fact that she arrogantly says she has "taken the trouble" to read him amounts to glorification of her own privilege and is casteist. Though, how much of him she has understood, is unfortunately, questionable. For someone who has such a control over the English language, this is surprising. So it is something else that makes her misquote and misunderstand what Babasaheb has said. She misquotes Dr Ambedkar who talked about the graded nature of inequality of the caste system, only to erase her own position and give herself legitimacy.

Roy has committed a political blunder by writing the introduction. I will not go into the factual errors, the political issues, overt and covert casteism in the introduction right now.

However, Roy has outdone her introduction to Annihilation of Caste in her response to Dalit Camera. Political blunders are forgivable, we have all made them and continue to make them. But she has been unapologetically casteist in her response to Dalit Camera. That is not forgivable.

She has very gently brushed aside all political objections to her introduction with a "you disagree, you dislike". She has not so gently trivialised a serious resistance to intellectual appropriation, to using the Annihilation of Caste for the perpetuation of the very system that it is a stinging critique of, as "nothing more" than a somewhat acrimonious debate. Savarna saviours have historically taken it upon themselves to emancipate, speak for and write about dalits and other oppressed peoples. How can she not see that she perpetuates the same savarna saviour syndrome when she arrogantly introduces the greatest modern leader of anti-caste movements in India and she says, "I was writing for those in India, and as well as

outside, who are new to the subject, for whom caste is just some exotic Hindu thing". The irony of an anti-imperialist crusader whose career as a writer has always catered to white audiences is not lost on anyone.

What names we are given, how we are raised, what languages we speak, what dialects and intonations we use, where we shit, who we fuck, what we eat, who we marry, who we are friends with, who works for who, what kind of work we do, who speaks, who listens - every choice, every decision, every privilege of our savarna selves are determined by caste. Roy also admits this in her introduction. Why is it then, that only when caste is used by dalits to assert and question representation that they are cautioned against such essentialist identities? Is woman also an essentialist identity? Alternately, if a cis gendered, savarna man made an argument that the category of savarna woman is essentialist and he insists on writing the introduction to a book on patriarchy, would that be acceptable to cis gendered, savarna feminists?

She should know better than to ask Dalit Camera what they would do if tomorrow Gujarati banias say only they can write about Gandhi. Why would Ambedkarites care if banias write or do not write about Gandhi? What a twisted reversal of the question to make a mockery out of identity politics. It sounds suspiciously like the reverse racism argument made by white people when called out on being racist or occupying space that is not theirs. Why don't we ask this question instead - why didn't you do a comparative analysis between Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar and expose "the saint" in an introduction to Hind Swaraj? Nobody disagrees that it is politically important to expose the misogyny, casteism, racism etc of Gandhi's positions to the world. But that could have been done in so many ways other than angering the very sections you claim to stand in solidarity with. "What if Mahars say that their understanding of Ambedkar is more authentic and more radical than that of other Dalits", she asks. Dalits have read, translated, enacted plays on, sung about and followed Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideals for several decades now, I seriously doubt if tomorrow they would make stupefying, jaw dropping arguments like the one only Roy seems capable of making!

Why is it that these dalit intellectuals have not protested in the same way when Eleanor Zelliot, Jaffrelot or Gail Omvedt have written about dalits

or the Ambedkarite movement? Or when Dhananjay Keer who was of the Bhandari caste wrote the biography of Babasaheb? Clearly, she is wilfully oversimplifying the question of representation. At one point, in her pointless casteist response to Dalit Camera, she even implicitly questions Dr Ambedkar writing about Sikhs, Muslims, adivasis etc. We condemn this, not because he is a thinker who cannot be questioned, but because you and I have no merit to arrogantly ask that question about someone who has spent his entire life in the pursuit of knowledge, engaging with and learning about struggles that are not his own, while struggling so much himself.

As an anti-caste radical pointed out in one of the responses to Roy, in 1994, in her review of Shekhar Kapur's film, Bandit Queen, Phoolan Devi was just a "woman" who had been raped and portrayed on film without consent. Not a dalit woman. Roy had a dalit character in her novel who in all probability, didn't make caste a less "exotic Hindu thing" for her white audience. Where is your engagement with caste? We ask again. Have you, while walking with them or talking to them, questioned why the leadership of the radical Marxists have no adivasi, dalit representation? Have you questioned the casteism of Gandhian movements against big dams you claim to have been part of? "How can any non-dalit be part of a dalit movement when you will not even concede that they have the right to engage with Ambedkar?" You have not engaged with Ambedkar, that is the charge against you. To write an introduction to Babasaheb's Annihilation of Caste, you have to, at the very minimum, be an Ambedkarite and have engaged with his writings, his ideals and movements that follow his lead.

Roy is not Dalit, not Hindu, she is secular, she is pro-poor, anti-dams, anti-globalisation, Marxist, pro-adivasi, booker prize winning writer; a celebrity, savarna media loves her, savarna progressives look up to her. But is she an Ambedkarite? Or does she show some aspects of Gandhian charity? "Why would I spend so much time reading what he wrote, and writing this introduction, just in order to patronize him?" No, she has nothing to gain out of writing this introduction because she is already famous and obviously not doing it for money, so dalits should be grateful to her for "taking the trouble" to read Dr Ambedkar and being so kind as to bless them with this introduction. No criticism will be entertained, it's a self-sacrificing moment of a new age mahatma, be grateful!

She says everytime she writes about big dams, nuclear bombs, corporate globalisation, she is accused of not being a displaced person, a bomb expert or an economist. But big dams, nuclear bombs and corporate globalisation are issues not identities. If someone points out the fact that she makes use of globalisation or corporate publishers to sell books, her response would have to address the hypocrisy involved in her stands. After all, comrade Arundhati Roy, even her strongest critics must admit, does sell products better than anyone else. If adivasis say tomorrow, we are all not one, do not contribute to ethnographic projects about us, we do not want to be beautiful photos or exotic people in your book and don't give royalties on our behalf to benevolent charitable trusts like she did in 2009, would she say, they are being essentialist and identitarian? Would she say, there is no limit to how many books can be written about adivasis? Wait, maybe she will!

About dalit intellectuals being called names, she nonchalantly says, "I'm sure I'd be among the finalists in the race for the most insulted people". For someone who I am sure is familiar with the tenet "the personal is the political" used by second wave feminism in the West (yes, I am essentialising the West), why does Roy take political questions as personal insults? How can she equate her individual, celebrity burden to that of the historical burden of insults that Dalit communities carry and have carried for centuries? Can Roy really not see that the insults are casteist? You are dalit, you haven't read enough, you cannot question savarna regimes of truth, you are intolerant, you have no sense of humour, you are over sensitive, SC STs and OBCs are corrupt but creative etc. It is the anxiety towards neo-educated dalits questioning in the same language as the savarnas use, talking back to you, occupying the same spaces as you, that is making savarna liberals and media so angry about valid political criticisms. Why is Roy getting so defensive about the question of competence? Is she above criticism? Is she the goddess of all things, big and small?

Why is it that casteless secular progressives who are publically pro reservation react with such aggression when asked by dalit intellectuals and activists to prove their competency or merit? It's very revealing, the reactions to the reversal of this burden of merit. Every time dalits assert themselves they are called "foot soldiers of identity politics", "brokers

of victimhood" etc., and now Arundhati Roy throws one more into the simmering cauldron of names - "authentic victims". I know many will jump to her defense and say she clearly says, "issue of authentic victim" and did not actually call dalits that. Language is slippery and we savarnas have gotten away with more blatant casteism using the right to freedom of speech, so I am sure you will this time too.

In the concluding paragraphs of Annihilation of Caste, Babasaheb says, "The intellectual classes to whom the masses look for guidance are either too dishonest or too indifferent to educate them in the right direction. We are indeed witnesses to a great tragedy". No matter how many more introductions are written, the caste, class, intellectual, social, cultural power of all of them will not match hers. Why else is Caravan and Outlook not reporting the voices of dalit intellectuals, writers, activists and only focussing on her voice? That is the power of her arrogance when she says more knowledgeable people should go ahead and write more introductions and that hers is just one among many. It's true that this edition will not match the circulation of that of the small, dalit publishing houses but it will, because of the power differential, create national debates, have glitzy book launches, numerous interviews etc where the focus will be Roy's introduction or her voice. It is precisely because of the power imbalance of Navayana publishing and Arundhati Roy introducing that makes it much more than a "gesture of a brahmin annotating the text and a non-dalit introducing it" as Anand claimed in his speech at the India Habitat Centre launch of the edition. Knowledge production, distribution and consumption are very powerful enterprises and have historically been the caste occupation of Brahmins. This so-called "gesture", hence goes against the very principle of the annihilation of caste.

In her response, she has asked how she has perpetuated caste by writing the introduction. Here are some ways you have - your mother Mary Roy is a teacher, the principal of one of the most elite private schools in Kerala. You are a writer. You are working within your caste occupation and getting publicity for being pro-dalit by using a treatise written against Brahmanical savarnas such as you. You guard the gates of knowledge production typically like your caste fellows. You have made a polemic text that was not palatable to caste Hindu reformers in 1936 till now, more

palatable by lending your name to it; you have brought Gandhi from the appendix (where he was placed by Dr Ambedkar) to the introduction, to the title; you do not see your own position as someone who has blood on her hands from the caste system - one can bet underpaid dalitbahujan labour (a dhobi, domestic worker, Mali, driver) gave you the free time to read, to whatever limited extent you have, Dr Ambedkar's texts.

In her response to Dalit Camera to clarify the cancellation of the Hyderabad launch of the book which was rumoured to be due to dalits stopping it, she feeds into the construction of the fanatical dalit. The SMS she quotes says, "Save Ambedkar writings. Oppose Navayan publication. Annihilation of Caste is our holy book. Arundhati Roy and Anand. S contaminated it. Participate in the protest on 9th March at Sundaraiah Vigynana Kendram, Hyderabad." Saying anyone, even non-dalits, could have sent this anonymous SMS to anonymous recipients in the next paragraph makes no difference. The damage is already done. Besides, which non-dalit would think of the Annihilation of Caste as a holy book? If that was true, what is the need for the Navayana edition to take it to non-dalit readership? The whole thing is absurd. So what is so fearsome about a protest even if it was planned? Do dalits have no right to assemble or protest?

She says the only special thing about the Navayana editions are the annotations. A self-effacing moment where the bouquet is handed over to S. Anand. So, are we then to believe that the annotations of Sanskrit shlokas and other footnotes by a Brahmin publisher are worth Rs 525? Selling traditional caste knowledge through amazon.in. How creative. How corrupt. Wonder what Ashis Nandy would say.

Anand asks in his speech at the IHC launch in Delhi, "do we keep Ambedkar confined to Samyak, Gautam and Dalit Murasu and thousands of such dalit platforms". Ambedkar looks confined on that stage in India Habitat Centre but he is free in dalit platforms, where he is understood, followed, revered, worshipped, admired by Ambedkarites. Free from the kind of assault and appropriation he faces in savarna forums. Ambedkar is not a sun that illuminates all alike, whether dalit or non-dalit. Savarna houses with potted plants and artificial lighting draw the curtains on the sun. Ambedkar is not universal like the sun; he has a special place

for Ambedkarites that cannot be appropriated. The ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity that Ambedkarite politics is influenced by may have universal appeal for people interested in the pursuit of justice and truth. But people who listen to grasshoppers and not allies, who write books on power politics, but don't admit how they might be involved in the politics of power themselves will not be able to see the light.

"Gandhi thwarted Ambedkar at every step" Roy says. No Ambedkarite would ever say something that is so untrue. Dr Ambedkar thwarted Gandhi at every step, exposed him for the fraudulent reformer he was, led the biggest religious conversion in the history of the world, and gave even his enemies their constitutional and fundamental rights and much more. Ambedkarite sons, daughters and transpeople have thwarted Gandhians, the right wing, the left, the secularists by being true to his ideals. The resistance to the Navayana edition of AOC is the voice of the Ambedkarites speaking truth to power. I am sorry you have reacted with such casteist arrogance to the criticism to your introduction, you cannot be an ally if the people you are attempting to make an alliance with reject you.

Can caste be annihilated? Not unless we show the courage to question our saviours in whatever form they appear. Not unless those savarnas who call themselves revolutionary are just enough to break structures of oppression we benefit from; not unless we learn to live, love, fuck and marry beyond caste barriers; not unless we are humble enough to admit that however much those of us who have caste privilege try, we will make mistakes and sometimes not see until we are called out on it; not unless we apologise and check ourselves tirelessly for internalised brahminism; not unless we listen more and talk less, learn more and teach less, not unless we move out of our caste professions, not unless we find a cure for this sickness together.

"Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from commingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change"- Babasaheb Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste, 1936.

~

My deepest gratitude to all my dalitbahujan friends (literate and "illiterate")
who have taught me, criticised me and made me a sharper Ambedkarite
than I would have ever been, had I only read books. Jai Bhim!

The incarceration of *AoC*

~ For one honest Brahmin preaching against Caste and Shastras because his practical instinct and moral conscience cannot support a conviction in them, there are hundreds who break Caste and trample upon the Shastras every day, but who are the most fanatic upholders of the theory of Caste and the sanctity of the Shastras. Why this duplicity? Because they feel that if the masses are emancipated from the yoke of Caste, they would be a menace to the power and prestige of the Brahmins as a class. The dishonesty of this intellectual class, who would deny the masses the fruits of their thinking, is a most disgraceful phenomenon. ~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *A Reply to the Mahatma*

Artist: Nidhin Shobhana

The New Harijan Sewak Sangh

~ James Michael and Akshay Pathak

"His statues—dressed in garish blue, holding a copy of the Constitution—have been put up in city after city" ~ Arun Shourie, Worshipping False Gods

"All the same, Ambedkar's followers have kept his legacy alive in creative ways. One of those ways is to turn him into a million mass-produced statues" ~ Arundhati Roy, The Doctor and the Saint

Caste privilege does not begin at ground zero; neither is it a zero-sum game. As a social capital, it defines a subject's identity at the very moment of her birth—the very act of naming the subject, with various privileged surnames such as Roy, Iyengar, Menon, Cherian, Chacko, Syed, Pathak, Sharma etc., is just a socially visible confirmation of this capital accrued at birth. The communitarian aspect to this understanding of caste means that the subject is not an autonomous individual, but part of a community that is hierarchically up in the order vis-à-vis the castes on the lower rungs.

Those higher up the social order not only control most of the resources that should be commonly available to all, but also thrive on exploiting the resources shored up by communities in the lower orders, including that of Adivasis. In addition, one should remember that these communities are segregated from each other through mechanisms such as endogamy, which reduces the possibilities of inter-caste love, and maintains the illusion of 'blood purity'. This practice is prevalent even in interactions between individuals belonging to sexual minorities. On Internet dating sites, one comes across profiles that state: 'looking for gay Brahmins only'.

A strong example of such segregation and subsequent usurpation of the capital of lower castes is that of Bharata Natyam. As is known, in its earlier avatar the dance form was known as '*Sadir*' or '*Dasiattam*', performed by *Devadasis*, who were lower caste women 'dedicated' to a temple. Subsequently, in the early 20th century, members of the Brahmin *varna* such as Rukmini Devi Arundale and E. Krishna Iyer became instrumental in 'reviving' and 'purifying' the art, which is now closely identified with

Brahmins. Similarly, the anti-Brahmin *'Bhakti'* movement contributed to the many traditions, including that of *keertana*, which congealed to form the present-day genre of Carnatic Music. However, Carnatic Music is now emphatically identified with the Brahmins, as if they are the sole heirs and proprietors of the art form.

One should also remember that all of the musical instruments that constitute the ensemble of a Carnatic music performance are made by the lower castes. Cowhide is a major component of many temple-based musical instruments such as *mridangam, chenda, idayka, pakhawaj, dholak* etc., and communities that work with the remains of a dead cow or eat beef are historically considered to be the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Similar is the fate of hundreds of thousands of artisans, craftsmen, and weavers who design and produce the *Kancheepuram or Pochampalli or Banarasi* sarees that adorn savarna bodies, or artists and stone masons who construct the temples populated by the savarna masses. The Bahujans are reduced to types that constitute a menagerie called 'Bharat', constructed after the imagination of the 'twice-born'.

The point to be noted is not only that the caste system is a well-oiled mechanism that maintains a hierarchical order among communities, but that it makes sure that the cultural capital of the Bahujans—and not just their surplus labour—is perpetually exploited. Bahujans, in the sense Kanshi Ram used the term, denote the SCs, STs, OBCs, and religious minorities who together constitute about 85% of the total population of India. The caste system's entrenched power in the 21st century, based on the exploitation of the Bahujans, was very well illustrated in the current debates around the republication of *Annihilation of Caste* (*AoC*) by the 'anti-caste, radical' publisher Navayana, run by self-proclaimed 'Ambedkar Zealot' Siriyavan Anand Iyengar. The Navayana *AoC* was embellished with a lengthy critical introduction written by none other than Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy.

Debates abound around the periphery of the text, and one of the points frequently raised was that of the commercialisation and appropriation of the cultural capital of the marginalised—that the social capital of the privileged is built on the usurpation of the cultural capital of the marginalised. The debate generated quite a lot of incisive and pertinent

commentary from various quarters. We aim to add to the debate by providing the much needed empirical evidence regarding how this appropriation is put into practice in the realm of knowledge production.

It has been reiterated time and again that anybody can publish Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and write an introduction to it. While nobody has called for a ban on the book (contrary to the false allegations made by some sections of the savarna scholars and the media), it is important to highlight the gross asymmetry that characterises power relations in India. Although everybody gets to interpret *AoC*, only a certain somebody gets the privilege to be heard, as the mass media choose to listen only if the enunciator happens to be a savarna who can dip into her privilege-pickle-bottle network at will. This automatic transition from everybody, who has the 'right' to publish and speak, to a certain somebody, who has the 'wherewithal' to command a premium audience, and rub shoulders with the powers that be, is not incidental.

It is thanks to the yawning chasm that separates the symbolic equality enshrined in the Constitution from the enclaves of actually existing inequality in this country. Therefore, whenever any such gross generalisations are made, we need to be sensitive about the fact that the scales have always been, and continue to be tilted in favour of the savarnas. For instance, when *Dalit Camera* raised a set of questions to Ms Roy regarding her caste privilege and ability to write an introduction to *AoC*, on the one hand, she tried to place the set of questions in the 'everybody is privileged in some way or the other' framework, and on the other, described herself as a writer who has had a history of engaging with a variety of issues in the past, including fighting Brahminism. While there is a grain of truth in all this, what is being forgotten during the invocation of such an 'authenticity', is that the hierarchy of privilege is not an even-steven game. The higher up the hierarchy one is, the greater is the number and range of resources that are at one's command.

With strict segregations in place, the vast amount of resources controlled by the savarnas is not up for grabs easily, as the fight to properly

implement reservation in Central Universities illustrate.[52] This results in the replication of the hierarchical system further down the order, with the bottom-most bearing the brunt of the most brutal system of inequality known to humankind. The hierarchy is uneven and severely skewed, with the bottom 80% left with less than 20% of the resources to scramble for. In short, if the Bahujans, or the 'privileged' Dalits, are being criticised for replicating the caste order of the savarnas, it is the savarnas who are unwilling to share the disproportionate amount of resources under their command that are to be blamed.

For this reason, it is simply myopic to make a general sweeping statement regarding the ubiquity of the caste-system, irrespective of the order of caste hierarchy. It is not as if Ms Roy is unaware of this elementary truth. For instance, she asserts in her introduction to *AoC*: "The top of the caste pyramid is considered pure and has plenty of entitlements. The bottom is considered polluted and has no entitlements but plenty of duties."

However, we want to emphasise that more often than not, only the savarnas have the liberty to assert their free will and transform into citizens who studiedly decry caste practices in the public, even as they transmogrify into 'casteists' to protect their private turfs at the slightest provocation, suspending all logic in the process—it does not seem to matter to them that their private reasoning collides with their conscientious free will. We studiously assert that all Indians are brothers and sisters in our schools and colleges, but do not find it odd to register our names in marriage websites seeking suitable partners who belong to our respective castes.

Ms Roy has taken pains to highlight that she is engaged in a fight against Brahminism, the reason she took the 'trouble' to read Ambedkar's writings. This claim rests on an even shakier foundation. On the contrary, Ms Roy, with her ill thought, albeit good hearted, interventions helps rigidify the hierarchy, and is being instrumental in perpetuating Brahminism. This is certainly not the first time that this has happened. Knowledge systems, as illustrated above, have been manipulated and usurped by the privileged throughout the known history of 'Bharat'.

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52 Babu, Hany M.T. Oppose the modalities of reservation adopted by Delhi University. *Round Table India*, 1 March, 2014. http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7257:oppose-the-modalities-of-reservation-adopted-by-delhi-university&catid=123:policy&Itemid=139 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

The 'walled-garden approach' to knowledge

The process of appropriation and usurpation follows certain codified rituals. Kuffir, one of *Round Table India's* editors, articulated this phenomenon on his Facebook wall as the debate was raging: "What seems to be on offer (not for the average Dalit-Bahujan, only for such rarefied species of humans as the savarnas of India and the west): the 100 pages (or less) of the actual text of the 'Annihilation of Caste' speech will carry a burden of a nearly 200-page 'introduction' plus over 100 pages of notes and stuff leading you to all the *char* or *chaurasi dham* of savarna academia featuring majorly the kind of writers and 'intellectuals' (as is evident from the excerpt we were offered as an appetizer) Dr Ambedkar had fought against all his life."

This scholarship, Brahminical and imperial in its essence, adopts an approach where the knowledge-production pattern mimics the closed eco-system of the WTO patent regime. A freely available text is encased in a copyrighted introduction and layered with copyrighted footnotes. And this is reflected further in how they parse the lines, give glosses to it, and lead us towards further scholarship and reading materials. This in itself can be an interesting exercise—for those who can afford it—except that if one dissects the process closely, it reveals a sinister design. A network of gatekeepers/mediators, mostly savarnas and whites, who do not just make knowledge more difficult to access, in terms of costs (redirecting us to repositories of international journals and book stores via footnotes where you have to pay in dollars to access knowledge), but also layer it with copious amounts of their own self-aggrandisement and self-promotion.

Take, for instance, the repeated references by Ms Roy to her publisher's articles in the footnotes and bibliography. Or how the annotations redirect the reader to the introduction by Ms Roy (Pg. 273, 103 of Navayana's *AoC*) ordaining her officially as the mediator, the conduit to *AoC*. In short, they do not just appropriate a text, they Brahminise it.

The process involves containing a text that has been floating freely and widely and was enabling the ongoing struggles of the Bahujans against the tyranny of caste by incarcerating and monetising it, adding 'value' by way of 'research'. And this 'value-addition' also tries surreptitiously to

canonise the incarcerated version of the text, even as the original falls by the wayside and is forgotten. This becomes clear in the introduction itself, where, by the time the reader reaches page 4, the footnote (No.5) boldly declares the forceful pulling out of *AoC* from the seminal government-published *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches (BAWS)* and placing the Navayana edition as the source to be referred to 'henceforth'. The usurpation is completed with the new stamp of authority.

This incarceration of the text is accompanied by erecting walls which further the caste discriminations that the text was meant to demolish in the first place. So, when Ms Roy talks about Khairlanji and how she was educated of the gruesome incident by Anand Teltumbde, a Dalit writer, his name is restricted to the footnotes. But when elaborating on the usage of the term Dalit, the scholar Rupa Viswanath, a Tamil Brahmin, is provided a red-carpet welcome—in fact, she is the first scholar (apart from Babasaheb) to be cited by way of name in the introduction. The text becomes a mirror of Brahminism and its endogamous caste loyalty, as it is revealed later in the bibliography that Viswanath's book on caste, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*, is forthcoming from Navayana this year.

Symbolisms, ruptures, and self-aggrandisements aside, let us look at some hard statistics. In the bibliography appended to the haunted-by-Gandhi introduction to *AoC*, one notices a list of about 120-odd books, articles, and research papers. More than half of these are by savarna authors (most, in fact, by Brahmins), a quarter by white authors, and less than 15 are by Dalits, and hardly any by OBCs or Adivasis. The same is true for the annotated *AoC*. In the 160 bibliographic references, the proportion of Dalit writers dips even further to less than 10 per cent of the total. The footnotes and annotations follow the same pattern. The book, if one analyses it in its entirety, is not just a conspiracy, but is a travesty and insult to Bahujans.

Much like the sweatshops that manufacture products for consumer markets across the globe, the hard toil of Bahujans feeds into the data systems whose trusteeship remains firmly in the hands of savarna scholars. The references have high price tags attached to them, while freely available resources from Dalit scholars and students, who put in

their hard work and precious research on the web (referred recently to as the 'insult machine'), is deemed unworthy. This is alarming since the book in question is brought out by an 'independent' publisher who claims to be an 'anti-caste junkie'.

The analysis of this particular book led us to closely look at the publishing house that brought out this book—Navayana. Even a cursory glance at its publications reveals to us the extent of Brahminical domination, even in a 'specialised' publishing house such as this, in the knowledge-production domain of the country. Out of the list of 61 authors published by Navayana and put up on its website, we could positively identify about 37 authors as belonging to privileged communities—this includes 16 whites and 21 upper castes. Of the remaining 24 authors, we could identify 11 authors as belonging to Dalit communities, along with 2 Blacks and 2 OBCs. However, the most astounding revelation was the discovery that out of the 21 upper castes, 16 were Brahmins (the details accessed on 23 March 2014 from Navayana website).

This kind of skewed representation of the upper castes, and more specifically Brahmins, in the knowledge-production circle, is all pervasive across India. For example, in the context of progressive West Bengal, comrade Prabhat Patnaik had recently talked about the "the domination of the Brahmin—'Boddi'—Kayastha castes in the intellectual, social, political and cultural life of the state."[53] He goes on to add, "...this domination is so complete, and has been so for such a long time, that one almost takes it for granted, not even noticing it." What comes across to us forcefully, while making these observations, is the realisation that the din of progressive rhetoric adopted by the savarnas has always been tactically deployed to maintain their existing advantage and assert their dominance.

In this context, let us critically look at Mr Iyengar's claim that he is an 'Ambedkar Zealot'. The very domination of Brahmins at his publication "...named after Dr B.R. Ambedkar's socially and morally concerned interpretation of Buddhism" proves that this claim holds little water. The description on Navayana's website adds, "Navayana is India's first and only publishing house to focus on the issue of caste from an anti-caste perspective". While we are unwilling to accept this claim, thanks to our

53 Patnaik, Prabhat. In the Long Run- The social divide in Bengal. *The Telegraph*, 16 July, 2013.

knowledge of anti-caste English publishing houses such as *Critical Quest*, which has made available *AoC* for a mere Rs. 45, and a plethora of other regional anti-caste publishing houses such as the Kerala based *Subject Language Press*, or the Kolkata based *Stree-Samya*, our acceptance of Navayana as an anti-caste publishing house comes with a caveat—that its anti-caste perspective is stridently Gandhian and hence anti-Ambedkarite in nature. The closest analogy that comes to our mind as we look at the publication's roster of the who's who of savarna anti-caste thought is Gandhi's Harijan Sevak Sangh formed in the wake of the Poona Pact. The programme statement of the Sangh, formed in 1932, claimed:

"*The League believes that reasonable persons among the Sanatanists are not much against the removal of Untouchability as such, as they are against inter-caste dinners and marriages. Since it is not the ambition of the League to undertake reforms beyond its own scope, it is desirable to make it clear that while the League will work by persuasion among the caste Hindus to remove every vestige of untouchability, the main line of work will be constructive, such as the uplift of Depressed Classes educationally, economically and socially, which itself will go a great way to remove Untouchability. With such a work, even a staunch Sanatanist can have nothing but sympathy.*"[54]

As the statement from the League—the Sangh was called the Anti-Untouchability League in its formative years—reads, it was established to persuade caste Hindus to remove the vestiges of untouchability. Babasaheb Ambedkar was deeply disturbed by the above described change in the nature of the League, which was established with the good motive of removing the ills of untouchability, without taking into consideration the needs of the untouchables or giving adequate representation to them in the organisation. As a result, Babasaheb, who was willing to associate with the League in its earlier phase, chose to resign from it citing the following reason:

"*The Harijan Sevak Sangh is intolerant of any movement on the part of the Untouchables which is independent and opposed to the Hindus and the Congress and is out to destroy it. Anticipating that such would be the consequences of the change in the aims and objects, I retired from the Sangh. Since the first batch of the Untouchables left the Sangh no attempt was made*

54 Ambedkar, Dr B.R. What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables. *BAWS. Vol. 9.*

by Mr. Gandhi to appoint other Untouchables in their places. Instead, the management of the Sangh has been allowed to pass entirely into the hands of the Hindus of the Congress persuasion. Indeed, it is now the policy of the Sangh to exclude Untouchables from the management and higher direction of the Sangh, as will be seen from the refusal of Mr. Gandhi to agree to the suggestion made by the deputation of Untouchables requesting him to appoint Untouchables to the managing body. Mr. Gandhi has propounded a new doctrine to console the deputations. He says, "the Welfare work for the Untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of Untouchability. The money that has been collected has been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics nor right would justify Untouchables in, claiming a seat on the Board of the Sangh." Mr. Gandhi does not realise how greatly he has insulted the Untouchables by his doctrine, the ingenuity of which has not succeeded in concealing its gross and coarse character. [...]It is pertinent to ask: why at one time he was anxious to have Untouchables on the Governing Body of the Sangh and why he is determined now to exclude them?"[55]

Does not the claim made by Mr Iyengar and Ms Roy, echoed by several other savarnas and whites throughout the current debate, who have had the misfortune of being cited by Ms Roy in her introduction and by Mr Iyengar in the footnotes, that the book is of the savarnas , by the savarnas , and for the savarnas , closely parallel that of Gandhi's, made in the wake of the formation of the Harijan Sevak Sangh? Ms Roy's reply to the open letter written by *Dalit Camera* confirms our suspicion that this is indeed the case. How else could we explain her statement—"I was writing for those in India, and as well as outside, who are new to the subject, for whom caste is just some exotic Hindu thing"—other than on terms set by Gandhi while forming the Harijan Sevak Sangh?

This confirmation was turned into an absolute certainty, when we tried to get a sense of Navayana's history as a publishing house. Although the publication was jointly started by Mr Iyengar and Dalit politician Ravikumar in 2003, the latter seems to have become more involved in politics since 2006, when he joined *Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi*, a Dalit political party based in Tamil Nadu. Navayana has been an Iyengar show ever since.

55 ibid.

Characteristically, in 2009, as mentioned on its website, Navayana "... decided to broad-base its publishing programme, for the struggle against caste cannot happen in isolation from other struggles for justice and equality", and started publishing white male authors such as Jeremy Seabrook, Jacques Ranciere, and Michel Foucault, along with various savarna authors such as Kamala Visweswaran, Dilip Menon, the late Sharmila Rege, among others, who have engaged in the business of writing anti-caste books. Probably, as Gandhi put it, this change in tack could have been calibrated for the welfare of the untouchables via the penance of the Hindus. We feel that the re-publication of *AoC* comes as the culmination of this hidden Gandhian agenda.

The messy clean up

The strangely titled introduction, 'The Doctor and the Saint', has already witnessed the perils and politics of translation and 'mediated understanding'. Telugu broadsheet *Andhra Jyothy*, based in Telangana, South India, translated 'The Doctor and the Saint' as *'Oka Vaidyudu, Oka Pravaktha'*, which, on re-translation, would mean 'One Medical Doctor, One Prophet'. Senior lawyer and human rights activist Bojja Tharakam in his interview to *Dalit Camera* ("*AoC* does not need any introduction", also featured in this book) asks pertinently:

"Is she denigrating both Gandhi and Ambedkar? Or denigrating only Gandhi or only Ambedkar? Sarcastic expressions are used against both or against one? If at all it is sarcasm, then why should she use sarcastic comments on Ambedkar which he doesn't deserve? Therefore, I feel the very title is mischievous, misleading, denigrating, and in bad taste."

But interpretations and intentions apart, the introduction itself should be scrutinised for its substance (or the lack of it). Take the language, for instance. A hip and chic deployment of metaphors—Hollywood blockbusters, Occupy Movement, Madonna, suits and designer bags etc.—that relay the location of the writer, a Booker Prize winner residing in one of the most expensive gated neighbourhoods of this country, and speaking to a largely savarna readership receptive to the witty gimmicks of a polemical author.

The entire exercise of commissioning and annotation (rewriting the text?) of *AoC* is an attempt to ornament a text, which is lucid, direct, and deep, and convert it into a decorative item which stands worthy of the purified drawing rooms of the savarnas. The argument that *AoC* was originally written for a 'caste Hindu' audience is flawed, for it ignores the most crucial fact that it was to be delivered by an 'Untouchable'. Moreover, it inadvertently places Arundhati Roy and Babasaheb on a common platform which is unacceptable on moral, intellectual, and political grounds. Let us also not forget that his speech was not delivered, because Babasaheb refused to alter his speech to make it palatable to caste Hindus. In fact, the very act of re-packaging and monetising a text under the pretext of getting it across to newer and ignorant readers defies the original spirit in which it was to be delivered. It is as if, 80 years down the line, the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal has risen like a phoenix to avenge Babasaheb's refusal to change even a comma of the original document, by seizing and manipulating the text, and making it malleable to their demands.

The introduction, which by Roy's own admission, is "almost a little book in itself", begins with the title and the author's name under it. The same courtesy is not extended to the *AoC* segment, whose author had been already sidelined in the marketing blitzkrieg around the launch of the book. What is further unscrupulous on the part of the publisher and the introducer is the simple fact that the original thought that carries most of the introduction, the deconstruction of Gandhi, is that of Babasaheb's, as anyone familiar with his works would be quick to point out. The essay just repackages a debate and discussion which had been succinctly and more than adequately framed by Babaseheb in *AoC* and other essays such as 'What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables'.

Navayana seemed to have perfected this technique in its earlier attempts to repackage Babasaheb's thoughts. The exemplar in this case is *The Myth of the Holy Cow* by D.N. Jha, which was republished by Navayana in 2009, with additional material appended to it—'B. R Ambedkar on Beef-eating and Untouchability'. Whereas he mentions several works by scholars including Rajendralal Mitra's 1881 work on the same, among others, Mr Jha neither credits Dr Ambedkar nor cites him anywhere, not even in the bibliography. We would not be surprised if the book, which is on the politics of beef-eating in India, would make one think that it is Mr Jha

who discovered the politics of myth-making around the holy cow or that the Brahmins used to eat cow meat during Vedic times, and completely (deliberately?) ignoring and erasing the extensive research on the topic done by Dr Ambedkar.

If the Navayana edition of *AoC* has a book-length introduction way bigger than the text it seeks to introduce, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* had already taken the process to a different level altogether—the book had relegated Babasaheb's seminal contribution to the backyard, repackaged as just additional material. One would want to think of this aś an aberration or an instance of editorial oversight from the part of the publishers. But unsurprisingly, similar is the case with yet another title from Navayana's Augean stable—*The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India*, written by Dilip M. Menon.

What are the chances of somebody writing a book named Essays on Caste in Modern India, without referring to any of the works of Dr B. R Ambedkar? Worse, what are the chances of somebody writing an essay titled 'The Blindness of Insight: Why Communalism in India is about Caste', which is part of the said volume, without referring to the man who first formulated it, and passing it around as if it were one's own ground-breaking discovery? Since our point of reference happens to be *AoC*, let us cite Babasaheb's perceptive remarks on communalism and caste from the same text:

"*Hindu Society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Its survival is the be-all and end-all of its existence. Castes do not even form a federation. A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes, except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. On all other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes.*"

One would want to think that the author and the editor, Anand Iyengar, who now poses as an expert on *AoC*, having annotated it generously, would have been more than careful to cite or acknowledge Babasaheb's insights on communalism and caste in the said essay or in the bibliography of the book. But no such luck awaits us here either. The irony is certainly not lost on us, when in the introduction of the 'Blindness book' it is

helpfully suggested, "His [the editor's] persistent questions have hopefully ironed out many of my initial, lazy formulations of many of the concepts discussed here".

The Navayana project has fine-tuned this strategy to the level of appointing a celebrity author, Ms Roy, who instead of casually erasing and usurping Dr Ambedkar's original idea, spends her precious time on distorting and misrepresenting him.

The Algebra of 'gnomification'

Roy declares in *The New York Times*[56], which branded the newly released book as 'The Gandhi Book', that "...there is nothing in The God of Small Things that is at odds with what I went on to write politically over 15 years". We must appreciate the truthfulness of that confession. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said had elaborated on how in a narrative or discourse one 'shuts out' a de-powered subject 'even when one includes, compresses, and consolidates'. This is best exemplified in *The God of Small Things*. In the novel, which many claim is roughly based on Ms Roy's childhood, one of the main characters—Velutha, a Dalit character—is objectified as a 'sex subject', whose 'psychological universe' remains mysterious but descriptions of the contours of his physique litter the pages in plenty.

"He was called Velutha—which means White in Malayalam—because he was so black." His body constantly is carved out by the author's exotic gaze: "She knew his back. She'd been carried on it. More times than she could count. It had a light-brown birthmark, shaped like a pointed dry leaf." Or: "As she watched him she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labour had shaped him. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Each plank he planed, each nail he drove, each thing he made had moulded him."

This gaze, this reduction of the subject to an amorphous object, often romanticising it to fit the narrative that ticks all the pre-ordained boxes

56 Deb, Siddhartha. Arundhati Roy, the Not-So-Reluctant Renegade. *The New York Times*, 5 March, 2014.

of self-suiting and tailored politics, which the progressive left liberals seem to excel at, has been perfected by Ms Roy in essays such as 'Walking with the Comrades', in which she imagines ossified Adivasis (though with 'fluid identities') whose 'struggle' is glorified via her casteist political lens. Criticising her romanticisation of the armed struggle of Maoists, Marxist scholar Jairus Banaji asks Ms Roy pointedly:

"Are we seriously supposed to believe that the extraordinary tide of insurrection will wash over the messy landscapes of urban India and over the millions of disorganised workers in our countryside without the emergence of a powerful social agency, a broad alliance of salaried and wage-earning strata, that can contest the stranglehold of capitalism?"[57]

In *The God of Small Things,* she had already signalled a penchant for fossilising Dalits. "Though, on the one hand, he [Velutha] was taken by surprise, on the other he knew, had known, with an ancient instinct, that one day History's twisted chickens would come home to roost." The sexualised body is further morphed into a primitive mind. At another point in the novel, she thrusts her version of sanitised politics on the same object: "Then one day he [Velutha] disappeared. For four years nobody knew where he was...And more recently, the inevitable rumour that he had become a Naxalite. That he had been to prison."

The continuity of her own indulgent fascinations is synchronised with consistent metaphors. While describing one of Velutha's moments with Rahel she says: "And that became a delighted, breathless, Rumpelstiltskin-like dance among the rubber trees." In another essay titled 'Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin' she uses the same metaphor of Rumpelstiltskin:

"Let's just say he's metamorphosed into an accretion, a cabal, an assemblage, a malevolent, incorporeal, transnational multi-gnome. Rumpelstiltskin is a notion (gnotion), a piece of deviant, insidious, white logic that will eventually self-annihilate."[58]

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57 Banaji, Jairus. Three responses to Arundhati Roy: Jairus Banaji. *Radical Socialist*, 24 March, 2010.

58 Roy, Arundhati. Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin. *Outlook*, 27 November, 2000.

The white-black gnome (Velutha means 'the white one' in Malayalam) is sometimes a Dalit Naxalite, at other times deviant and malevolent.

Sixteen years later, her politics follows the oft-trodden path; the 'gnomification' continues to add to her glass menagerie of Rumpelstiltskins. Only that, the 'gnomifying' gaze has now turned towards Dr Ambedkar and his 'suits': his followers and their 'creative' ways—'million mass produced statues'—of keeping his legacy alive; Dr Ambedkar who 'did not have enough money to print his major work on Buddhism'; Dr Ambedkar who became 'anxious, even desperate, to manoeuvre himself into becoming a member of the constituent assembly'; Dr Ambedkar, over whose world 'Gandhi loomed'.

This probably explains why she chose to characterise the millions of unique statues made by Bahujans across the country as mass-produced. For the error in judgment made by her is grievous not only because it closely mimics right-wing ideologue Shourie's statement that Babasaheb's statues can be found in 'city after city dressed in garish blue', but that it is patently false. It is false because Ms Roy fails to distinguish between mass-produced statues and statues produced by the masses. The former gives us a sense that these statues are getting produced at a secret location on the lines of the assembly line developed for the Ford Model T, when, on the contrary, as the latter suggests, each of these statues bears testimony to the unique and immense diversity of the Bahujans spread across the length and breadth of the country. The contrast strikes us hard, when it dawns on us that the books she writes, including the book for which she has written the introduction, are products built after the assembly-line model, each a replica of the other, mass-produced for the global elite.

In this context, it would be interesting to think about what a non-mass-produced statue of Babasaheb would look like, and we were fortuitous enough to locate one such statue at one of the campuses of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), in Hyderabad—the same BHEL, that arch, prototypical, Brahminical enclave, which Nehru so affectionately called a Temple of Modernity. Babsaheb's bust was found installed in front of a sports stadium named after him, a Bharat Ratna, now tastefully ensconced among the nationalist luminaries he did not want to ever associate with. The quote attributed to Ambedkar reads, "The centre of religion lay not

in the relation of man to God. It lay in the relation between man and man. The purpose of religion is to teach man how he should behave towards other men so that all may be happy."

The original quote taken from *Buddha and His Dhamma* reads:

"According to *him*, the centre of religion lay not in the relation of man to God. It lay in the relation between man and man. The purpose of religion is to teach man how he should behave towards other men so that all may be happy", [59]where him (italicised) refers to the Buddha himself. Plucked out of its Buddhist context, now Babasaheb is made to look like a votary of religion, and more importantly a votary of Hinduism which he trenchantly subjected to critical examination and chose to leave for ever, stating clearly at the *Yeola Conversion Conference* in 1935 that, "Even though I was born in the Hindu religion, I will not die in the Hindu religion."

This book (Navayana's) clearly follows in the same line of usurpation and distortion that we have been attempting to highlight via examples illustrated above. Ms Roy weaves her narrative from the vantage point of a writer claiming to tell a story, perhaps sublimating her perceived and even genuine agony; it is then very surprising how she conveniently sets aside her own subjective markers. This is on display the moment one opens the book and sees the page where author biographies are listed. It mentions that Dr Ambedkar (shockingly stripped of his hard-earned title) was born in an 'Untouchable family'. But S. Arundhati Roy and S. Anand Iyengar get listed—with their caste names either altered (Roy instead of Rai) or altogether dropped (S. Anand)—for their 'professional qualifications'. How easily they shed caste, *varna*, and various other markers of privilege into which they are born, when they so choose to. It finds a brief mention in the context of the essay or in the acknowledgements, but when listed next to Babasaheb, their 'Touchability' is not worth mentioning. Her politics, Ms Roy tells *The New York Times*, 'comes in the way of her fiction', but presumably her caste privilege does not. She negates it with casual ease, while making the most of it, a choice that only someone born in the middle of great privilege can afford to exercise. Though, 'much of the way' she thinks 'is by default', we are told.

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59 Ambedkar, Dr B.R. Buddha and his Dhamma. *BAWS, Government of Maharashtra, Vol. 9.*

While discussing how to go about this essay, the authors (James and Akshay) had agreed that embracing modernity and getting rid of caste are exactly what the Bahujans (and several other marginalised groups) want and demand, while the savarnas want to 'travel light' by either disguising or making invisible their own privileges. One of the reasons why the two of us got together to interrogate the reservations we have had with this particular book was our different locations (Pathak, a savarna; James, a Bahujan) and how that informs our critique.

The wrath of the insult machine

The re-issuing of *AoC*, with an introduction by a celebrity author, can always be seen as an exercise in vanity. The months spent working secretly on the book, and the suspense that was built around it, is akin to the theatrics of Gandhi, which as we demonstrated, remains the Holy Spirit that fuels the venture. Once the book was launched, its excerpts found their way into mainstream savarna media (and not to specialised sites on Ambedkar's thought like *Round Table India* or *Savari*).

The interviews and public utterances of the publisher and introducer already suggested an imagined 'fear' of a backlash. 'The Gandhi Book', as *The New York Times* re-named it, was expected to create furore among the right-wing Hindutvavadis. However, the criticism, unexpected for the publisher and the introducer, came from elsewhere. But the ammunition that must have been amassed against the imagined 'fear' was unleashed without much introspection.

A certain clique of writers that finds profuse mention in the book began a slandering campaign on social media, terming Dalit criticism as 'fascist', 'misogynist', 'xenophobic', and 'intolerant'. The 'upper castes' who supported the criticism (such as one of the authors of this article) were branded as 'opportunists'. 'Clicktivist' was a term generously employed to belittle and demonise the opposition.

Ms Roy, continuing with her Gandhian patronisation, asked everyone to 'keep a cool head', for the Internet, she insisted, was an 'insult machine'. She chose to pay little attention to the fact that the social media give scores of

Bahujans the choice and freedom to cut through the mesh of segregation that had so far kept them away from the very castles that were built for the privileged by them. Social media, in a sense, enables a very modern form and space for 'Direct Action' that Babasaheb had advocated. Perhaps the criticisms posed by the lower castes could be looked down upon as the 'schadenfreude' of the 'clicktivists'. But, as is evident by now, the 'insult machine' has managed to expose the insincerity and hollowness of the perpetrators of this bizarre exercise. *AoC* could very well be denigrated as a 'utopian' idea imagined by Babasaheb Ambedkar. However, it is worth remembering that Babasaheb's true spirit would always be reclaimed and protected from the continuing efforts at Brahminisation that he fought against so bravely and tirelessly.

Postscript—No Country for Fisherfolk

A month after we had published the essay you are reading now, minus this postscript, on *Round Table India*, two developments came to our attention, especially in the context of the arguments we have raised in this essay. The first was the unceremonious axing of the author Joe D'Cruz by Navayana.

Sahitya Akademi award-winner Joe D'Cruz does not believe in or support Hindutva. He is neither part of any of Modi's think tanks nor does he write paeans supporting Modi's regime. Yet, when he expressed his opinion that Narendra Modi was the right candidate for being India's prime minister on Facebook, all hell broke loose. D'Cruz clarified his opinion by stating that his support for Modi is based on the firm belief that if the prime ministerial candidate comes to power, the lives of the marginalised sections, including those of coastal India, would improve. In reaction to the statements made by Joe, whose book, *Ocean Ringed World*, was due for publication in 2014 from Navayana, his translator, V. Geetha chastised him for supporting not only a 'political disaster' but a 'downright evil' person. Navayana was quick to axe Joe from its roster of authors, by stating on its website "...there cannot be a place for such an author in a political publishing house like Navayana. Navayana is more sad (sic) about Joe's decision than about having to withdraw from this publication. But we are glad we came to know Joe's stand before the novel was published." This controversy erupted in April 2014.

Contrast this with another fact about the Navayana edition of *AoC*. Navayana's edition was produced with the help of several savarna collaborators, chief among them being Arundhati Roy. There was yet another Roy (Roy) who collaborated with Anand in producing the book—Bibek Debroy—who rose to prominence as the translator of *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagawad Gita* into English for Penguin. Debroy was instrumental in translating into English and parsing the Sanskrit couplets that Babasaheb cites in *AoC* and was especially called in for this purpose. He is also a well-known economist, and has written books on economic policies, including a 2012 book called *Gujarat: Governance for Growth and Development*, which according to a *Business Standard* interview published on 23 May 2014, "placed him squarely in the 'Modi camp'".[60] The interview is replete with Debroy's endorsement of Modi's Gujarat model.

In this context, the question before us is quite obvious. How could Anand Iyengar, the publisher of Navayana, who wears his anti-Modi, anti-caste sentiments on his sleeve, axe an OBC author without so much of a thought, but enthusiastically collaborate with a savarna economist, who is a well-known supporter of 'the Gujarat Model' and Narendra Modi, to produce, an anti-caste, anti-Hindu classic as *AoC*?

The other disturbing incident was a call for papers for an international conference on humanities and the social sciences to be organised by the Forum on Contemporary Theory, headed by Prafulla C. Kar, professor of English, the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda.[61] The conference note makes clear an intention to domesticate Dr Ambedkar's seminal text, riding high on the Roy/Navayana project of appropriation, by placing it in 'conjunction' with Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, urging us to read *AoC* as a "complement" to the latter. It denigrates Dr Ambedkar by claiming that he returns to Gandhi's trope of "swaraj" via 'a Freudian mode of "transference". This is loudly reminiscent of Ms Roy's belief that 'Gandhi loomed' over Ambedkar's life. And sure enough, the organizers declare their inspiration behind the conference to be the long introduction to *AoC* by Roy that woke them to the novel idea that "Hinduism with its

60 Datta, Kanika. Lunch with BS: Bibek Debroy. *Business Standard*, 23 May, 2014.

61 Re-Imagining Theory: Towards New Horizons in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. 21-24 December, 2014. Venue: International Centre, Goa. http://www.fctworld.org/17th%20international_conference.htm (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

entrenched caste system still continues to be the Achilles heel in the charged debates about our identity as a nation."

These incidents further confirm two of our major criticisms against Navayana's *AoC* project: D'Cruz's axing reiterates our belief that the publishing house Navayana is "of the savarnas, by the savarnas, and for the savarnas ", while the said conference by the savarna scholars proves that the Navayana *AoC* would indeed serve as a major conduit for domesticating and appropriating Babasaheb's seminal and revolutionary thoughts.

Arundhati Roy's inquisition: How she groups Ambedkar with European fascists

~ Murali Shanmugavelan

This essay, based on Roy's text and the original *AoC* text, uncovers how the *introduction* misappropriates and misinterprets Ambedkar's seminal work on caste. It does that by doing an analysis of Roy's text to show that her *introduction* is often her own worldview and assumptions on caste, Adivasis, politics, development and progress of India: these are summarily used to distort the original text of *AoC*; portray Ambedkar as anti-Adivasi and to accuse him of using the language of eugenics. This essay substantiates Roy's misappropriation and misrepresentation of the original text; questions her authority on the subject matter; and the politics of structural privileges and representations of those producing anti-caste knowledge.

Roy, apparently wrote this introduction '..for those in India, and as well as outside, who are new to the subject, for whom caste is just some exotic Hindu thing.'[62] So the introduction is apparently targeted at those who are not familiar with Ambedkar's texts and at those who are not sympathetic with the Dalit struggle.

Roy's introduction to the *Annihilation of Caste* (*AoC*) opens with a polemic which draws readers' attention to the absence of debates on Dalit atrocities in the international media circles. Roy compares Malala's global attention with Surekha Bhotmange, a Dalit woman who was raped and tortured in Khairlanji in 2006: Madonna dedicated a song to Malala; *Time* magazine featured her on the cover; and western political leaders came out to support her. Roy who is against (and benefits from) the agenda of corporate media and the west's neo-liberal agenda, uses the very same markers to illustrate how Dalits are silenced.

62 *Dalitcamera Ambedkar.* Arundhati Roy replies to Dalit Camera. Published on *Round Table India*, 15 March, 2014. http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7284:arundhati-roy-replies-to-dalit-camera&catid=119&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

The betrayal of Surekha and her family in the Khairlanji massacre actually came in the form of the deafening silence in the Indian mainstream media. Compare this with another tragic incident: the 2012 Delhi gang rape that invoked (inter) national consciousness of some of the issues faced by Indian women. Nirbhaya, the victim, was awarded The International Women of Courage Award by the U.S Department of State.[63] Anoushka Shankar, not Madonna (sorry Roy) named a song after Nirbhaya.[64] *Democracy Now* radio interviewed Anoushka. UN Women released a press statement. Roy's friend, admittedly one of her inspirations, Naomi Klein wrote, 'Indians, it seems, have had enough.'[65] It is the same type of people who wept for Malala but continue to be selective in their writing and ignore Dalits.

Introducing such structural bias at all levels across political ideologies could have offered a far more compelling argument as to why the seminal text on the destruction of caste should be read by all those who believe in equality, justice and dignity.

Roy's introduction to *AoC* often suffers from overwrought prose thus missing opportunities to make a convincing case for reading it. The analysis is also often superficial and sometimes misappropriates the original text to criticise Ambedkar. Some examples of this are provided below.

Was Ambedkar pro-eugenics?

Roy accuses Ambedkar of using the language of eugenics, 'a subject that was popular with European fascists' to describe a community. Ambedkar was taken out of context here and was sensationally grouped along with European 'fascists'. She then quotes Ambedkar's argument out of context: "Physically speaking the Hindus are C3 people. They are a race of pygmies and dwarfs, stunted in stature and wanting in stamina." This

63 The International Women of Courage Awards http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/programs/iwoc/2013/bio/index.htm (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

64 Nigam, Aarushi. "Anoushka Shankar names song after Delhi gang-rape victim". *Times of India*. 7 October, 2013.

65 Goodman, Amy &González, Juan. "One Billion Rising: Playwright Eve Ensler Organizes Global Day of Dance Against Sexual Abuse". *Democracy Now*. 14 February, 2013.

quote certainly gives an impression of Ambedkar being a racist. But what did he actually say?

Section 5 of *AoC* in 8 parts (972 words to be precise), is dedicated to an analysis to prove Caste is not eugenic. His first sentence was, "Some have dug a biological trench in defence of the Caste system. It is said that the object of Caste was to preserve purity of race and purity of blood." Ambedkar's discontent at linking Caste with eugenics is plain and clear. In the second part he said, "As a matter of fact (the) Caste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of caste are really distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts." In part 7 Ambedkar ridiculed, "An immense lot of nonsense is talked about heredity and eugenics in defence of the Caste system." These are only excerpts from the original text where he made a range of compelling arguments to prove Caste is not eugenic.

His own conclusions were, "This (his analysis in first 6 parts of Section 5) shows that Caste has no scientific origin, and those who are attempting to give it an eugenic basis are trying to support by science what is grossly unscientific (5.7)."

To those who are still unconvinced, Ambedkar's dramatic explanation was to ask "what sort of men it should have produced if caste is eugenic?" Ambedkar's final ammunition was: according to eugenics, Hindus are C3 types, a race of pygmies and dwarfs, stunted and wanting in stamina and therefore India, as a nation, wouldn't be fit for military service. He then concluded that this showed that the caste system did not represent the science of eugenics. Roy conveniently censored the context and wants her readers to believe Ambedkar would resort to irrational methods to make a case against Hinduism.

Roy fails to understand that *AoC* was written to counter the range of potential pro-caste arguments that might be used, including those based on pseudo-science and race. The opportunity here to critique the severity of Brahminical hegemony is regrettably lost by grouping Ambedkar with European fascists. Roy distorts the original text to mislead her readers that some parts of Section 5 of *AoC* are outdated.

On Adivasis

Roy writes that 'Ambedkar too stumbles' on the Adivasi question and 'adds his own touch of Brahminism' while also echoing 'the thinking of colonial missionaries and liberal ideologues'. She then presents the readers with edited excerpts from the section 8 of *AoC*: "Thirteen millions of people living in the midst of civilization are still in a savage state, and are leading the life of hereditary criminals..."

As a believer in modernity, Ambedkar was of the view that 'aborigines' should be brought into the fold of 'civilisation'. He probably did not share Roy's romantic views on Adivasis. He was deeply concerned if Hindus would ever recognise and understand 'aborigines'. He argued that caste would continue to be to the detriment of aborigines and wrote that "the Hindus will probably seek to account for this savage state of the aborigines by attributing to them congenital stupidity" (8.3). His reference to Christian missionaries (8.4) was to make a case that Hindus would never improve the lives of 'aborigines' as it would mean 'adopting them as your own, living in their midst, and cultivating fellow-feeling – in short, loving them' (8.3). He was also worried about their criminalised status(under Criminal Tribes Act, 1871).

Roy also states that '(H)is views on Adivasis had serious consequences' by letting the state become the custodian of Adivasi lands. This insinuates a ludicrous claim that Ambedkar's view on Adivasis led the Indian Constitution to seize Adivasis' homelands. Roy has created an image of herself, through media activism, as the representative of Adivasis of India. In the essay, 'The Greater Common Good', Roy admitted, "I was drawn to the valley because I sensed that the fight for Narmada had entered a newer and sadder phase. I went because writers are drawn to stories the way vultures are drawn to kills..." [66] Later, in an interview by Franny Armstrong, when asked why she was campaigning for the Narmada movement, her self-absorbed reply was: "... the (Narmada) Valley needed a writer, it needed somebody to say, "Look this is what is going on.....this is the ecology, these are the economics

66 Roy, Arundhati. The Greater Common Good. *Outlook*, 24 May, 1999.

and this is what the national picture is."[67] This is essentially a politics of representing an aggrieved population – with or without their consent - to the powerful cosmopolitans. It is also worth recalling, in this context, Gail Omvedt's open letter to Arundhati Roy on why the movement's leadership (or representation) was filled with urban elites and there was no top ranking Adivasi leadership.[68] Now, Roy has cried foul at Ambedkar in order to claim the title of the Chief Representative of Adivasis in India.

Introducing Ambedkar through Gandhi

Debates between Ambedkar and Gandhi are historic and important. These debates certainly need to be taken to today's generations to shift perspectives on equality, non-violence and justice. Ambedkar, however, did not spend his entire life replying to Gandhi. Ambedkar also had to face challenges from other leaders like Nehru. He may not have been successful in electoral politics but today's Dalit consciousness and assertion is unthinkable without him. Therefore, introducing the *AoC* text by solely comparing it with Gandhi's politics is actually limiting Ambedkar's significance.

Roy's introduction denies readers the opportunity to understand the nuanced relationships between caste, class, religion, capital, technology and neo-liberal politics in India and among overseas Hindus. She talks about caste patterns in the economy (including absence of Dalits and Adivasis in the Forbes billionaires list!), capital and social networks but does not provide serious analysis.

Roy's own views on capitalism, class, Marxism and Adivasis often take the front seat in introducing Ambedkar's text. To her, Ambedkar had embraced a pragmatic western liberalism which she connects with today's neo-liberal-market-aggressive-capitalism. She then uses this opportunity to launch her views on globalisation, development, industry and dams, and admires Gandhi's prophetic words on the horror of western civilisation by anecdotally linking his views with global warming.

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67 Armstrong, Franny. For The Greater Common Good, The Pen as a Tool for Activism. *Reprinted at http://www.animalliberationfront.com*, 2014. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

68 Omvedt, Gail. An Open Letter to Arundhati Roy. *www.narmada.org*, 1999. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

Anti-caste movements and ideology are full of complexities, are multi-layered and require strategic alliances with different ideologies and groups. Technology and capital, for example, are used to invoke Dalit assertion and equally to suppress the movement as well. Dalits' responses in social media to her introduction and the right wing online propaganda against Dalits is a case in point. Her introduction doesn't reflect the nuances behind such contradictions, especially in today's world. For example, Dalits and anti-caste intellectuals are always wary of romanticising rural lives in India as the smooth functioning of the rural eco-system is inextricably linked with (caste-bound) duties and hierarchies. Anti-caste intellectuals, therefore, often embraced technology, capitalism, urbanisation – often at risk of experiencing new forms of inequalities - as ways to break the caste system. Roy's approach of critiquing *AoC* as outdated by linking Ambedkar's idea of modernity with perils of western liberalism and western notions of progress and then romanticising Adivasis' lives only reveal her academic understanding of caste which is different from a lived-in experience.

Structural privilege

In several places, Roy quotes how 'history has been kind to Gandhi' and how his 'godliness has become a universal phenomenon'. She is also baffled at Gandhi's popularity in South Africa and speculates he was 're-imported'. What she doesn't share – another missed opportunity - is that Gandhi along with Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Junior, like Malala, provides no threat to western hegemony. These apostles advocated peaceful negotiations with oppressors in the name of reconciliation. The reason why Ambedkar, Malcolm X and Steve Biko, like Surekha Bhotmange, are not popular even in their own states and will remain underdogs (or 'frothing hyenas', if you prefer) is because their articulation is unsettling to structurally privileged people and those who enjoy hierarchy and power. In fact, it is not difficult to see that it is the same structural privilege that has provided the opportunity to the author to pen this introduction.

Further, concerns have also been raised by others about this introduction and there may be more to come. For example, what is the need to refer to EV Ramasamy with the caste surname 'Naicker' after he announced the deletion of his caste surname and asked others to do the same in 1929 at the first provincial Self-Respect Conference? It's worth noting here that

AoC's first ever translation and an attempt to reach masses – without any introductory text – was published in 1936 by *Kudi arasu*, the Dravidian party publishing house set up by EV Ramasamy.

In another instance, Roy rightly points out, caste debates, unlike racial debates, are hardly discussed in the international circles as caste is *au culturale* and not colour-coded. She quotes an example of the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, where India successfully made the case that (a) it was an internal matter, and (b) the practice of caste was not the same as race. But she is quick to make an assumption that, 'Ambedkar would have agreed with them [the arguments advanced by the State]'. To imply that he would have supported the state which took a contrary position to Dalit activists is an unsubstantiated assumption and simplistic reading of his work.

Overall, the introduction lacks a nuanced and contextualised understanding of *AoC* that is required to re-introduce this text to the desired readership. Misunderstanding or misrepresenting of the original text (especially sections 5 and 8) clearly raises questions about the author's understanding of *AoC*. To horribly misquote Edward Said, the introduction 'puts the author in a whole series of possible relationships with *AoC* without ever losing her the relative upper hand.'[69]

According to Roy, the targeted readership conflates Hinduism with mysticism, spiritualism, non-violence, tolerance, vegetarianism, Gandhi, yoga, backpackers and the Beatles. If challenging these notions is the reason behind publishing this introduction, then it could have been a critique of Brahminism and Hinduism, with reference to Ambedkar, rather than an introduction to *AoC*. At the end of the introduction, Roy says that caste cannot be annihilated 'unless those who call themselves revolutionary develop a radical critique of Brahminism.' Perhaps that should have been the start of the book.

69 Said, Edward W. Orientalism. *New York: Vintage Books*, 1994.

Between Saviour and Seller: Critiquing Preface Politics

~ **Praveena Thaali**

In this essay, I will try to place some of my observations to add to the fascinating debate around the Navayana edition of *Annihilation of Caste* and A. Roy's introduction to it.

At the outset, I would like to state that people who write about, interpret or contextualize *Annihilation of Caste* as theory and praxis should critically analyse caste as a reality in Indian society and they must think of annihilating it by acknowledging their own caste capital. In fact, while looking at Arundhati's writing, the immediate question that came to my mind was this: is it an introduction to *Annihilation of Caste* or to B.R. Ambedkar? It then made me wonder whether the writer is seeking contextual popularity by iconizing Ambedkar in order to compare him with Gandhi? And the most important question: what must have led them - the writer and her publisher S. Anand- to think about the necessity of an introduction like this or what were the factors that guided this venture?

In the present context, the Dalits are obviously looking with scepticism at an intervention like this, for both *Annihilation of Caste* as well as Ambedkar, do not need any special introduction. This can be seen in two ways – as a woman writing the introduction, and as a renowned literary figure/activist engaging in the same. However, this kind of intervention cannot be read without problematising the background of the writer and the publisher. In another sense, it is surprising to note that Ambedkar and his text still need the 'favour' of such an introduction, when Dalits are affirming their self-respect through writings, protests and cultural activism with Ambedkar as a focal point.

In fact, Babasaheb's work itself exemplifies the articulation of one's self-respect in a caste ridden society. Therefore, it is really intriguing that some publishers still believe that there is a need for elaborate 'introductions' (prefaces) to Ambedkar's works and Dalit writings to prove their authenticity. We saw a similar process of 'prefacing' at work in the upper

caste feminists' collective's introduction to the *Intersections of Gender and Caste*, the *EPW* issue (May, 2013) on the *Review of Women Studies*, featuring the writings of various Dalit women. Similarly, they believe that, whatever knowledge is produced by Dalits needs to have a cover, framework or flavour from the 'authentic' knowledge makers among the upper castes.

Though Dalits are fully capable of articulating their subjectivity, Arundhati Roy believes 'history has been unkind to Ambedkar and that consequently his books are not shining in the bookshelves unlike Nehru's and Gandhi's'. In other words, Arundhati's upper caste motherly sympathy operates to undertake a mission to deliver Ambedkar to the unreached, and to 'fill the gap' or 'bridge the gap'. It is this messiah consciousness (as Anoop Kumar has observed in his essay 'Resisting a Messiah', also featured in this book) that made Arundhati take on an hegemonic saviour role with the mission of introducing *AoC* and Ambedkar to the Indians 'schooled differently'. However, if she wants to 'de-school' Indians with her non-practicing caste ideology, shouldn't she start with herself?

In fact, one is reminded of a crucial point, which Ambedkar had already raised about those who wish to 'liberate' the untouchables before they liberate themselves:

"It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry "We must do something for the Untouchables". One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying 'Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu'. It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the Untouchables. If there is to be a Mission, it must be to the Untouchables and if the Untouchables can be cured, untouchability will vanish. Nothing requires to be done to the Touchable. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him. Is this assumption correct? Whether correct or not, the Hindus like to cling to it. The assumption has the supreme merit of satisfying themselves that they are not responsible for the problem of the Untouchables".[70]

70 Ambedkar, Dr B.R. "Untouchables or The Children of India's Ghetto", page. 2. *BAWS, Vol.5, Government of Maharashtra.*

If Arundhati wanted to approach this text based on praxis and write an introduction, she should have first mentioned how to critically engage with her own community's caste capital as well.

Moreover, why does she still keep 'Roy' as a tail with her name, which clearly affords her privileges in the public domain (knowingly or unknowingly). It would have been much better for her to open up her critical engagement with caste by beginning with her own community's understandings of *Jati Nirmoolanam* as a person who wrote about various inter-caste exchanges and engagements in her novel.

These are some of the reasons why I feel Arundhati's patronizing perception towards *Annihilation of Caste* and Dalits is nothing but caste dominance.

Dalits, as a community are being humiliated by the bitterness of casteism and they have the right to be doubtful about the interference of upper caste reformers/liberators in their discourses, even if the latter have genuine intentions. Any reformer can be sympathetic to Dalits and even to Ambedkar in order to patronize them. However, the politicized readers know the history of publishing and circulation of Ambedkar's writings and speeches all over India. The book *Annihilation of Caste* has been read by millions of people without any introduction by any upper caste messiah. Therefore, any reformist manoeuvres, which advocate for the greatness of Ambedkar in the name of charity and loyalty must be condemned.

The necessity of an introduction needs some further analysis. Does *Annihilation of Caste* really need an introduction? If yes, who needs it? The 'Brahminical inscribed politics' of the introduction clearly says that it focuses on a group that has not yet read Ambedkar, and that they may be ready to read him if a person like Arundhati 'interprets' it for them. Likewise, Arundhati also holds a cultish position as a popular writer who could bring attention to *AoC*, as claimed by the publisher. And it is obvious that, it provides a contextual popularity to the publisher for marketing also. This actually means that both writer and the publisher are ready to use the privilege of caste as a desirable instrument in the present knowledge domain, all in the name of providing a wider market for the book.

Consequently, the "preface politics" deliberately sidelines the actual text of *Annihilation of Caste* and Arundhati becomes the centre point of all discussions and this links to the casteist hegemony over knowledge still prevalent in India.

It is unfortunate that people who are privileged by caste never talk about how they are engaged with it from their childhood itself, instead they just want to interpret lower caste peoples' experiences to declare their solidarity with them. If any one really still believes that *Annihilation of Caste* and Ambedkar need an introduction, they are real hypocrites and casteists who still demand an introduction to caste. It can thus be concluded that for the annihilation of caste, the dominant knowledge arrogance inscribed in the attitude of the reformists as demonstrated by A. Roy and her publisher has to be addressed and annihilated.

A Tale of two Prefaces

~ Karthick RM

With her new preface to Dr Ambedkar's '*Annihilation of Caste*', Arundhati Roy and the publishing house Navayana, have received criticism from Dalit activists and writers. Very compelling critiques have been put forth explaining how Navayana's annotated version of an Ambedkarite classic is an act of appropriation. In the short essay that follows, I seek to explain why it is an act of appropriation with the help of an analogy.

In 1961, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* was released. The book, which was later praised as the "Bible of the Third World", had a preface written by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, probably one of the most recognizable faces of "First World" philosophy of the 20th century.

The beauty of Sartre's preface was that it offended everyone privileged – the French nationalists who wanted him murdered, liberals like Hannah Arendt who thought that the preface was more incendiary than Fanon's own text, dogmatic leftists who dubbed it anarchistic. These critics' only contribution to Fanon studies is to reduce an intellectual giant's thoughts to a Lilliputian idea of "lived experience", who felt that a White man had overstepped the boundaries in writing a preface for what they felt was the work of a "Black man".

However, Fanon himself was above such thoughts. He wanted Sartre to write the preface because he considered Sartre a "living god"[71]and several biographical accounts confirm that he was greatly satisfied with the controversial preface. The power of a preface is that it conditions the way a text is read. And when the author of a work has conveyed an explicit approval for a preface, he is in a dialogical process with the one who writes the preface, and he also indicates that he wants to be read in that spirit. Or, Fanon wanted to be "framed" in the ideological parameters of Sartrean humanism and posthumous criticisms of the preface can only be termed as acts of bad faith.

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71 Lévy, Bernard-*Henri*. Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century (trans. Andrew Brown). *Polity Press*, 2003.

Now, let us turn to a book that can rightfully be called a Bible, a manifesto of liberation, for the Dalits and the other oppressed castes in India – Babasaheb Ambedkar's "*Annihilation of Caste*." Is there any indication anywhere in "*Annihilation of Caste*" that he wanted a Brahmin publishing house and upper-caste intelligentsia to frame how he should be read? Is there any indication anywhere in any of Ambedkar's works that he wanted upper castes to assist in interpreting him?

Since the answers to these questions, to the best of my knowledge about Ambedkar, are in the negative, the critics are right when they allege that Navayana is engaging in an act of appropriation when they decided to frame him in the fashion that they did. What those defending Roy should realize is that what is being contested is not Roy's right to write an essay on Ambedkar – I'll add here that I enjoyed reading the essay for the stuff on Gandhi – it is this framing Ambedkar within certain paradigms and reading him in a manner which has little relevance to Ambedkar's politics that are being challenged.

There is also a particular way in which the criticques are being read by those to whom they are addressed and the way they respond to the same. It is as though they are responding "Ooh, we understand and sympathize with your lived experience but we are trying to help you with our knowledge." This seems to be a way of saying: "knowledge still belongs to us, but you guys can only talk from experience." Sorry to disappoint you friends. Ambedkar's critique of caste was not based on lived experience alone but rather was and is one of the most rigorous theoretical analysis of a social system of oppression that has confounded and condemned the oppressed for millennia. And likewise, the Dalits and lower castes who are "claiming Ambedkar for themselves" are not doing so based on their lived experiences alone, but also because of a thirst for emancipatory knowledge by challenging the epistemological privilege that Brahmins have enjoyed for ages.

What is this privilege? The superiority of the Brahmin is not just based on economic power that can change with fortunes. It is also not just a weak pseudo-science argument of race superiority. It rests largely on the Brahmin's power over definition, to determine good and evil, social and anti-social, clean and unclean, high and low, acceptable and unacceptable,

interpretation and misinterpretation. It is the Brahmin's power over the Word, over knowledge, and over meaning.

In contemporary India, take the Indian nationalists, the Hindu nationalists, the central committees of the various socialist parties, postcolonialists, liberals, anti-modernists, anti-Eurocentrists, anti-Enlightenmentists, anti-colonialists, feminists – which caste defines the ideological paradigms in any of these different political/intellectual/ groups?

When the Brahmin determines what the philosophy of oppression is, the Brahmin determines what 'neutral' liberalism is, and the Brahmin also determines what resistance is, where is the space for a counter ideology to emerge? And when a Brahmin runs a powerful publishing house that markets how Dalit thinkers should be read, is it not legitimate to think that the traditional monopoly over knowledge and meaning is being extended to assimilate even the voices that counter it?

Going back to Fanon, he clearly recognized that Europe had a thousand problems. But he also recognized that it produced schools of thought that sought to take man to a higher level. Thus, Fanon accused the White colonizer of hypocrisy, of belonging to intellectual traditions that spoke about equality but behaving as a person practising inequality. But in our case, as recognized by Ambedkar and thinkers like Periyar, the Brahmin is a hypocrite when he talks about equality. The radical potential of the thoughts of Ambedkar lies in the fact that he recognized how, throughout history, even in the most liberal vision of equality as propounded by the Brahmin, whatever intellectual tradition the Brahmin hails from, takes the Orwellian line of "some animals are more equal than other animals." Consider this, Arundhati Roy has pointed out several times in her public speeches that over 90% of the cadres of the Maoist party are Dalits and Adivasis. But why is it that over 90% of the leaders of the Maoist party and its urban intelligentsia come from the upper castes?

Some years back, Hindutva ideologue Arun Shourie wrote *Worshipping False Gods*, a third-rate pamphlet against Ambedkar. The sordid history of the Hindu religion shows us one thing – while there are one section of Brahmins who denigrate and deride the gods of the lower castes, there is also simultaneously another section of Brahmins who try to accommodate

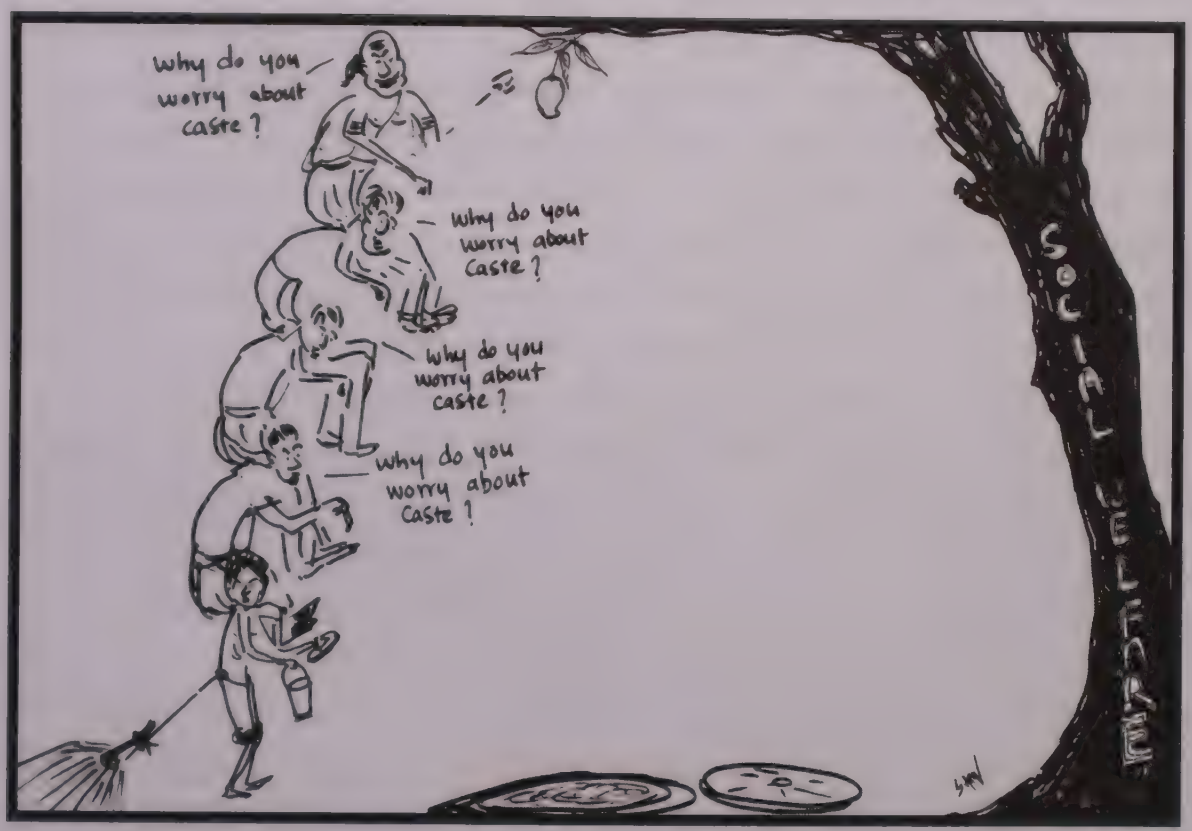
and assimilate these gods within the Brahminical tradition and spin their own myths about these gods which are then imposed on the rest of the population. The lower castes have lost several such gods in history. They cannot lose anymore.

They cannot lose Ambedkar.

The Ghost of Brahminical hegemony

~ There can be no special virtue in Brahmin rule if the Brahmin was treated as common man along with the Non-Brahmins having the same rights and same duties. Brahmin rule if it is to justify itself, it must do so by conferring special privileges and immunities on the Brahmins as a class. ~

Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India*


why do you worry about caste?
why do you worry about caste?
why do you worry about caste?
why do you worry about caste?
SOCIAL DEFENCE

Artist: Syama Sundar Unnamati

A Rescue Project Initiated by the Oppressors

~ Huma Dar

Why the Exercise of Caste(ist) Privileges Can Never Annihilate Caste, Or What's Wrong With the Navayana project on AoC

The problem with the Navayana project, firstly, is due to the publisher's casteist presumption that the task of "introducing *AoC*" to upper-caste Indians and the "rest of the world" can, or should be, undertaken by anyone (even willy-nilly) from the oppressor's group, who *very importantly* has a history of no substantive engagement with, nor a nuanced understanding of, caste – leave alone of sensitive politics of solidarity with an oppressed people, the Dalit-Bahujan. On the contrary, the introducer, Arundhati Roy, is on record as having proudly declared her own "caste-lessness" and "classlessness"[72] in the profoundly casteist and classist society that is India today (and yesterday)! This politics of invisibilizing one's entitlements and privileges is a crucial component of structural Brahminism, a mainstay of the Navayana enterprise, which has been further critically explored by James Michael and Akshay Pathak in "The New Harijan Sewak Sangh" included in this volume.

This presumption is also deeply vexing as it rests on the unstated *a priori* negative judgment about the writing and theorizing abilities of the Dalit-Bahujan intellectuals. It assumes that there was no better intellectual, with a strong record of engagement, available to write an introduction from amongst the Dalit-Bahujan. This fundamentally casteist assumption bolsters the Vedic genealogy of Dalit-Bahujan as emerging from the (purportedly lowly) feet and even outside the body of the ideal Purusa, as intrinsically lacking in intellectual capacity, and therefore as worthy of the most despicable inhuman treatment ever. Especially vis-à-vis the Brahmins. (Guess where the Brahmins are supposed to have emerged from? If you guessed the "speaking" mouth, the "thinking" head, you guessed right.) Funnily enough, this "upper-caste" insistence on "representing" Dalits (or their radical texts) almost mirrors Gandhi's insistence on being the sole

72 Barsamian, David. "Interview with Arundhati Roy." *The Progressive*. 16 July 2007. http://progressive.org/news/2007/07/5078/interview-arundhati-roy

leader, sole representative of all of India, especially of its alleged "Hindus," and even more obsessively of its Dalits[73].

The primary defence of the Navayana project to the multi-tiered argument above has been the facile accusation of doing "identity politics" – as if, at a deeper philosophical level, any politics is anything but. Even had it been otherwise, the fact remains that the work on caste by non-Dalit-Bahujan intellectuals and scholars like Omvedt, Zelliot, Jaffrelot et al, who seriously engage in the study of caste, is received favourably or at the very least has not incurred a similar critique from Dalit-Bahujan. It is these scholars' thorough and long-term engagement with the issue of caste that is thus recognized: a truth too inconvenient for Navayana to acknowledge.

As a digression, it would make for an amusing exercise to note how frequently this charge of "identity politics" is bandied around by members of the most dominant groups whose privilege resides precisely in being able to remain unmarked by their "identities," if they so wish; whose identities are secure and prioritized; and most importantly, whose power is strong, pervasive, and invisible to themselves. It's like men who whine about not having an "international men's day," or white folks about not having a "white history month," or "upper-caste" élite Indians who castigate Kashmiris for their "nationalistic" fervour and call them "intoxicated-by-Azadi," and other inanities.

Secondly, the problem is due to the sheer (presumptuous?) verbosity of the "intro" which overwhelms the length of the text it allegedly introduces by more than 200% - whither humility, one wonders?! Why would any introduction presume to have more material and more worthwhile material to theorize on caste than Ambedkar in his concise and convincing text? What genre of "introductory" writing is this?

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73 The Dalit-Bahujans & Adivasis were usually considered outside the pale of "Hinduism" (read: Brahminism). Then at the end of the 19th century, for political purposes, some savarna groups sought to forcibly assimilate them, but at a very superficial/nominal level, into "Hinduism" – no such word even exists in the Vedic texts because there was no conception of any such religious community, except for the different (upper) caste communities and their differential powers & entitlements. This forced assimilation enabled the "padding" of the thin numbers, and thus bolstered the representative power, of the three "upper-castes." It is only via this maneuver that the savarna communities at less than 15% of the population could claim to be the "majority community" with ~80% of the population, i.e., Hindus.

Thirdly, the problem lies in the title of the introduction: "The Doctor and the Saint." Notice there are no scare quotes around the 'Saint' to highlight the intended sarcasm. Gandhi is mentioned exactly once in Ambedkar's original text of *AoC* (1936). Only later was Gandhi's response to *AoC*, published in the condescendingly titled, "Harijan" [born of god, Hari], and Ambedkar's response to that piece by Gandhi included in the self-published text, however ONLY in the appendix. So not only does Gandhi make his way from the appendix to the actual title of the introduction and the excerpts thereof published in major Indian newspapers, but he actual invades its body as well.

Moreover, this facile title is amenable to "mistranslations" in many South Asian languages. For example, in Telugu, to "the medical doctor and the prophet", as has already happened. This tale of deliberately ambivalent titles or headlines is reminiscent of another piece by S. Anand, called "Dalits in Reverse," published in *Outlook* (April 2005), where he gets away with saying terribly problematic stuff about the mythical "reverse casteism" – as un-institutionalized, non-structural, and therefore as imaginary as "reverse racism" – by claiming that he was only being ironic and that the headline was hijacked by a "disgruntled Brahmin editor"![74]

Fourthly, the problem in the Navayana project lies in the insidious shifting of focus from a rigorously and meticulously argued case against the caste system in *AoC* to a comparative analysis of Ambedkar and Gandhi. Even when it dwells at great length on Gandhi's deplorable racism, casteism etcetera – and this is by no means the first text to do that – why should it be assumed that just because of this negativity, the Dalit-Bahujan would somehow be mollified from a legitimate indignation at the hijacking of a canonical text in its alleged introduction? This loud chest-beating and declaration of savarna (upper-caste) guilt *while* exercising casteist privileges (of easy access to publishing, for example) and shifting the focus back to savarnas is in consonance with how those in power remain invested in centring the narrative on themselves.

As a side note to my Kashmiri family and friends: think about how when one starts talking about Kashmir, the nationalist élite Indian even at his

74 Anand, S. A Rejoinder To Dr Iniyan Elango's Article "Pot Calling The Kettle Black". www.countercurrents.org, 22 October, 2012. (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

sympathetic best (yes, it's a masculinist position), will start talking about how bad he feels: what fun he had when he went to Kashmir as a child and got photographed in "Kashmiri paraphernalia" but now feels guilty about; how his sister or brother flirted outrageously with the "obscenely handsome" Kashmiri shawl-walla or hotelier; how he refused to haggle with the pony-walla to show him his tolerant (Brahminical) Indian love; how much he loved the Kashmir landscape as pornotropically depicted in the Indian film, *Bobby* (1973); and how we must understand that it is really, really hard for him to hear about Kunan Poshpora or Gawkadal or Pathribal etc.,[75] and therefore he'd rather not, and must hog the time by talking only about himself or his feelings. (All of these are from actual conversations with male and female élite "upper-caste" Indian scholars, artists, and so on.)

Related to issue number four above, if Roy had not framed the essay as an introduction to *AoC* and published it as a standalone piece, or in some anthology, it would have been a different story altogether. Coincidentally, Roy later confessed in an event at the Columbia University Teachers College, on October 13, 2014, that she published her essay in the Navayana project on *AoC* as a "strategy" – a Trojan horse per chance? – as she was wary of it being "banned," at the behest of Gandhians one assumes[76]. As an analogue, imagine an "intro" to some canonical text critiquing Zionism which totally digresses into a comparison between Edward Saïd and Norman Finkelstein. Hmm, I know, it's a bad analogy, but still.

Fifthly, the Navayana project deliberately commodifies into a commercial enterprise a text from an historically oppressed people at the bottom of the socio-economic totem pole. Especially since the text is generously available pro bono online and very inexpensively in hard copy in various South Asian languages, as an evidence of Ambedkarite politics of equity

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75 Rape in Kashmir: A Crime of War
http://m.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/INDIA935.PDF
Gau Kadal massacre:
Schofield, Victoria. *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War.* London: *I.B. Tauris*, 2003, p.148. She calls Gaukadal "worst massacre" in its history...
http://m.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/09/11/everyone-lives-fear-0
Mirza, Waheed. "Growing up in Kashmir's war zone." *BBC News.* 16 August , 2007
http://kashmirprocess.org/reports/alleged_Perpetrators.pdf (All Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

76 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBJ6oBENENo (1:14:00 – 1:14:00)

and sharing. Especially when the price of this fancy Brahminized "annotated and introduced" version is hiked up by 900-1100%? (Anti-capitalism, someone?!)

Sixthly, the citational politics of this project of annotating one of the foundational texts on anti-caste theory, *Annihilation of Caste*, is extremely problematic to say the least. As James and Akshay point out, this Brahminized annotation project cites a hundred "upper-caste" or white people for every ten Dalit-Bahujan! Done by a Brahmin, this draws intellectual legitimacy back to "upper-caste" privileged sources, snatching "lower-caste" narratives from their mouths.

Seventhly, the sheer arrogance of the entire exercise must be pointed out. What can one say about the mind-boggling arrogance and insularity that is inextricably embedded in a "rescue project" initiated by any member, however benign, of a long-entrenched oppressor group, if the project insists on using these casteist entitlements and unfair privileges to appropriate a canonical text of, from, and by, the oppressed? A "rescue project" that desires to take a jacked-up Brahminized version to other members of the oppressive group and especially to the "white folks" abroad, who apparently "exoticize caste"?! And all this DESPITE an outpouring of clear critique and multiple arguments re: methodology, content, and context, from the intellectuals of the oppressed group, published on a rare site run by the oppressed themselves: *Round Table India* (*RTI*) – a Dalit-Bahujan owned portal, run on volunteer efforts alone.

Finally, closely connected to the argument above, the few responses to these robust yet polite critiques have been shameful to read, and give clear evidence of casteism operating implicitly and explicitly amongst the "upper-caste" "rescuers." The multiple rich and nuanced arguments of authors on *RTI* have been summarized and written about in major savarna-owned and savarna-run outlets, albeit in weak caricatures, strangely *without exact citations* in most of the coverage of this affair, making the Dalit intellectuals seem anonymous, nameless, faceless, and mob-like.

These savarna responses display classic straw man fallacies, laden with typical casteist slurs of Dalit-Bahujan as being innocent of "literary"

reading habits, devoid of the requisite skills of understanding "irony," of being like "hyenas frothing at the mouth,"[77] of being threatening, and of being akin to the fascist Hindutvavadis!

The critique of intellectuals from the oppressed group, published not in any major Indian newspaper, which are overwhelmingly appropriated by the savarna Indians, but on *Round Table India*, has been facetiously compared to the potential vehemence from Gandhi-worshippers, or just plain hegemonic Indian nationalists who are deliberately educated to not know much about Gandhi but to uncritically respect him as a father of (casteist) India. Strangely enough, or perhaps not so strangely, this latter response hasn't quite materialized yet. Is it because they know that such Barthian "inoculation" via a little bit of guilt, and appropriation of the Other is the best way to keep the Brahminical hegemony going strong? How else do we explain the appropriation of the indigenous gods and goddesses into the touchability of the Vedic pantheon, and yet relegation of the indigenous people to "untouchability" via clear religious doctrine?

To what end this rescue project? Can caste be annihilated by the continued and adamant exercise of casteist privileges in knowledge production and dissemination? Haven't the Brahmins had a stranglehold on precisely these domains for millennia on end? Can a revolution be initiated while looking down on the oppressed, and not trusting their intellect, their instincts, their decisions? Personally, I find this the most damning argument of all.

Note: to those non-South Asian people, to whom all brown people appear similar and homogenized, please remember that the WASPs are closer to the African-Americans and Native Americans than the "upper-castes" to the supposedly "lower castes"...

This piece, written on April 11, 2014, was initially meant as a response to those Facebook friends who sent me messages asking me what I think about the Anand-Roy project on AoC and why I think it is deeply flawed. These are some thoughts and conclusions gleaned from the efflorescence of excellent critiques and cogent arguments published on Round Table India, and from multiple stimulating conversations with some amazing friends,

77 Style, Jugni. Arundhati Roy on Activism and her Past. *The Huffington Post*, April 1, 2014.

especially Anu Ramdas, Kuffir, Anoop Kumar, Gee Imaan Semmalar, Akshay Pathak, and James Michael. Any deficiencies are obviously mine.

Masked Messiahs: The Politics of Comparison

~ Joby Mathew

This essay was published on the 150th birth anniversary of Ayyankali. On June 18, 2014, which marks his 73rd death anniversary, Kerala University instituted a chair in his name and invited Arundhati Roy to deliver the keynote address in which she reduced the 'Ambedkar-Gandhi debate into a Gandhi-Arundhati debate' and 'deliberately ignored' Ayyankali.

The debates on the relevance of Dalit-subaltern leaders obviously create new imageries in the contemporary discourses. Therefore, any acts like building of statues, naming of institutions, and intellectual engagements on them would have effects at various levels. These claims are even more valid where the Dalit experience has been considered and used as a 'non-historic' subject to make authentic history. In fact, the social memory of Dalits carries the significance of unwritten history, which has never been a subject matter of history at all.

For Dalits, the available records denote their miserable past and hence any efforts that depict their self-esteem are confronted by the dominant public. The controversies that emerged on Mayawati's statues and the Ambedkar Park in Uttar Pradesh are the best examples to illustrate this. These incidents show the 'common feeling' of the dominant Indian public against Dalits' claim over social space. This has been an issue for them since the post-Mandal period. The physical as well as intellectual claims are equally relevant. In this context, I try to look into the recent controversy that arose as a result of a keynote address given by famous novelist Arundhati Roy at a seminar organized by the Ayyankali chair, University of Kerala.

The return of Gandhi

These days Ayyankali has become the centre of various debates and struggles though he was neglected by the dominant discourses all this while. Unlike other Renaissance figures he was technically an illiterate person, but he believed in anti-caste ideology and led the movement

to destroy the evil caste codes that existed in Kerala. It is difficult to categorize Ayyankali's greatness in a single dimension because the fruits of his radical efforts are reflected in the life of Dalits in various ways. Thus, the resurgence of Ayyankali puts forward new claims over social space in present Kerala.

The recent discussions merely focused on Arundhati's criticism of Gandhi, but hardly paid any attention to her ignorance on Ayyankali, as reflected in her speech. Unfortunately, most of the later discussions focused on a statement made by Arundhati that "should Dalits carry human excreta anymore?" At first glance, it shows her kindness to speak for Dalits, but if we revisit her words carefully, we would find that there seems to be a conscious disregard towards the imageries of Dalit resistance. In fact, such acts of savarna liberals have not been debated in the public.

A series of debates occurred in different media on the statements made by Arundhati Roy. 'Gandhi was a casteist and a supporter of Varna system', and that, 'our nation celebrates wrong heroes' - these were the major arguments in her speech. She also said, "Do we need to name our universities after a person like Gandhi or do we need to name our universities after someone like Ayyankali?" The discussion emerged around the question of 'who is the real Mahatma, Gandhi or Ayyankali?'

Soon after the speech there were two kinds of arguments that came out: that Arundhati Roy insulted Gandhi was one such debate, and that she sparked off a revolutionary debate was the other. Interestingly, a few Dalit groups have taken up this discussion further by justifying her statements criticizing Gandhi. Most of the media were interested in the Gandhians' demand to prosecute Arundhati for criticizing the 'father of the nation'. In fact, the seminar organized by the Ayyankali chair witnessed the 'return of Gandhi' and Arundhati Roy became the centre of all debate. Unfortunately, once again, Ayyankali was disregarded in the public debates.

There are some other questions that also arise from this controversy. It can be argued that Arundhati tries to bring forward Gandhi who had been discarded by the Dalit movement. For Dalits in India, Ambedkar became the core of their political and ideological struggles as soon as his groundbreaking writings got translated into various languages. This was

reflected in their knowledge production as well as struggles, which have turned into a political resurgence. As a result, the idea of annihilation of caste became an important phenomenon in Indian knowledge discourses and naturally Gandhi, the advocate of the Varna system became irrelevant. So then, why is Gandhi being centered in a new socio-political context where people like Ayyankali should have been the focus?

In fact, it was the Nehru-led Congress government which portrayed Gandhi as a central figure of the national movement and placed him as the father of the nation. This sort of institutionalization of Gandhi spread a message to the world that India means Gandhi. Thus, Ambedkar who had played a key role in the building of the modern Indian nation was ignored by the over projection of Gandhi in post-independence India. The works of Dalit Panthers, Bahujan movements, and other anti-caste movements retrieved Ambedkar and brought him into the mainstream Indian political discourse.

In short, these matters were not a concern in Arundhati's speech in which she simply called Gandhi a casteist and got advantage out of it. In actual fact, a person like Arundhati criticizes Gandhi by using the foundation created by Ambedkarite movements. In addition, she even reduces the Ambedkar-Gandhi debate into a Gandhi-Arundhati debate by taking over Ambedkar's thoughts. This is a classic example of how savarna critics of caste do not bother about the backgrounds of anti-caste struggles led by Dalit-Bahujan leaders. They instead try to appropriate their ideas to project themselves.

Intellectual dishonesties and opportunism

In her speech she kept on repeating, 'I am not saying anything new'. Here the question that begs to be asked is: why can't Arundhati or any of the savarna liberals raise their own arguments against caste? Interestingly, many of the dominant caste intellectuals refer to 'scavenging' to explain the brutality of caste. Though Roy criticizes Gandhi's concept of the 'ideal Bhangi', she ends up underlining the imagery of scavenging. It has been argued that if any intellectual wants to emphasize the pathetic condition of Dalits through these derogatory images, that itself amounts to symbolic violence.

There are new forms of 'invisible caste' that have been operating inside the so-called progressive state of Kerala. While Arundhati addressed the Kerala public, the uniqueness of caste matters in Kerala did not become a concern for her; instead she wanted to project the alliance of caste and capitalism. The 'progressive savarnas' of Kerala always use north Indian circumstances as a metaphor to elucidate caste practice. Hence, this deliberate silence on various dimensions of caste in present-day Kerala exposes the real faces of such masked messiahs.

Arundhati hardly mentioned Ayyankali in her entire keynote address at the seminar organized by the Ayyankali chair. Generally, keynote addresses follow certain ethics in their content to evoke the particular person after whom the chair is named. Unfortunately, Ayyankali and his enormous struggle were missed out in her keynote. It can be seen as a deliberate attempt to disregard the contributions of Ayyankali.

Noted Dalit thinker Sunny M. Kapicadu pointed out the same in a news channel discussion on MediaOne[78]where he said, 'we can't just believe that this kind of ignorance is quite natural'. Also, it is extremely difficult to tolerate such mistakes. Moreover, he argues: 'we can see that scholars and intellectuals are bound to exclude certain facts when they address the caste question'.

This type of ignorance is very crucial because leaders like Ayyankali have been deliberately ignored in the dominant history of Kerala. In fact, establishing a chair in his name was in itself a revolutionary act in Kerala where the remembrance of Ayyankali is really needed. Much like Arundhati did in her address, many others, including EMS Namboodiripad, have excluded Ayyankali from Kerala's history. It is clear that a collective amnesia has been at work to erase certain important figures like Ayyankali from the existing knowledge realm.

Arundhati always tries to compare Ambedkar and Ayyankali with Gandhi in different contexts. The present controversy in Kerala can be seen as the follow-up of her introduction to '*Annihilation of Caste*'. Though

78 *MediaOne*. Kerala police mull case against Arundhati Roy for comments on Gandhi- Special Edition (1),August 2, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5prlAceBW8&feature=youtu.be

the savarna intellectuals criticize Gandhi they clearly want to preserve him as a standard figure for analysing others' contribution. In reality, comparisons between the contributions of Dalit-subaltern leaders and Gandhi are unnecessary, because the Dalit movement never used Gandhi as a metaphor to read Ambedkar. Also they have been criticizing him a lot through various political engagements. It is argued that, there is a politics of dominance being inscribed in each comparison, which constantly keeps the savarnas as the centre. Arundhati Roy's unfair comparison also aims to limit the evolving imageries of Dalit icons in India.

An Introduction to Anoop Kumar's "Misogynistic and Xenophobic Rants"

~ Vinay Bhat

Anoop Kumar's "misogynistic and xenophobic rants" are nearly five years old and archived on Facebook (as long as it remains in business). I came to know him and his *rants* during the debate about Binayak Sen accepting an international award on behalf of the Tribals of India.

I started reading him. His seminal words shook my entire being. When I first read him, I felt as though someone had walked into the room and told me to stop pretending to be blind. And to stop acting like the room is dark. Anoop Kumar's writing bridges the gap between the caste Hindu's stupidity and his arrogance.

Anoop Kumar has been a prolific commentator on Facebook and an even more prolific activist in real life, although many of my caste Hindu brethren would refuse to acknowledge the latter (we require formal essays to prove 'merit'). Unlike the daily self-righteous jingoisms of numerous caste Hindu academics and self-professed intellectuals, his experiential observations receive barbs of being "rants", while theirs get dubbed as "theory". Of his numerous thoughts and words, I find it hard to decide which would be his "most radical text". All I can say is that he has been a humble student of Ambedkar and has been teaching several ignoramuses, such as my Brahmin self, in the process.

Only justice I can do right now is to present his FB updates and comments – termed as "misogynistic and xenophobic rants" in several savarna circles on Facebook - in their original glory to all upper caste and white scholars who do not have access to his "Dalit ghetto" (which I do). I take this privilege and have compiled whatever he has written in response to upper caste arrogance when Arundhati Roy was commissioned to write an introduction to Ambedkar's radical text: *Annihilation of Caste*. She was commissioned by no less than an 'anti-caste' publishing house that makes money on Ambedkar bashing and Dalit assertion. However, if criticizing Ms Roy or calling out her complicity in guarding her caste

privilege and in silencing voices from the Dalit movement, or both, is considered misogyny and xenophobia by anyone – I say may you forever live in your sacred cave! I, for one, feel that 'his anger gives us all a little shelter, a little dignity'.

End of the Introduction

Comment addressed to Roy

~ One more non-Dalit messiah of Dalits has finally arrived.

To 'rescue' Dr Ambedkar from fanatic, identarian Dalits who refuse to see the larger picture, global conspiracies, Ambani's ugly *Antilla* and the power of Neruda's poems…

Wonder what took her so long. Was expecting (this) since quite some time. Welcome!

To Anand

If you want to sell books, please do so. But do not mess with the politics of the movement, do not thrust people on us. Do not make messiahs out of people who have absolutely no clue about Dalits and have nothing but contempt for their struggle.

I know nothing I will write will make sense to you...you and your gang are way too powerful for all the Dalits in this country.

But then I have a lot of patience. Will wait.

To friends

Just wait and watch your timeline. You will be soon flooded with links, reviews, the amount of space which even Dr Ambedkar after writing one seminal text after another had never got in his whole life.. which this 'introduction' to his one text will get now..

To S. Anand

Do not tell me that you chose Arundhati Roy because she is the voice of the voiceless, because she is so fucking pro-Dalit, because she is an amazing intellectual who would do justice to Ambedkar..

We both are way too smart for you to tell such crap and me to accept.. and you know her politics as much as I do.

And unfortunately, I am not even amongst your over-fawning upper caste acads, media persons and foreign scholars who go gaga over your attempts to bring Ambedkar into their wretched lives which they could never (do on their own) before you arrived..

You chose her ONLY because her name will sell your books well, quite well actually and to sell yourself too. Nothing more.

And in turn robbed off all the Dalits of their movement's capital so cruelly, so mercilessly!

~

So the moral of the story is that there is not a single Dalit in the entire world fit to write a foreword for Dr Ambedkar's 'seminal text' and that is to be 'introduced to upper caste world', to be able to 'force them to read..'

...Dalits who carried his texts literally on their shoulders, their whole lives, around every nook and corner of the world..

If any commercial publisher had done it, I could have still understood, (but) not someone who calls himself 'Ambedkar zealot', someone who never lets go of a single opportunity to remind us of his impeccable credentials, someone who is so forceful in the arguments around representation...

Still remember how I was being told very disdainfully four years ago in Shahpur Jat, at a tea stall, on how Arundhati Roy knows nothing about

Dr Ambedkar and how you were forcing her to read '*Annihilation of Caste*'.

I was witness to the deep contempt you showed towards her then for never engaging with Dr Ambedkar.

I knew it then only what was coming. I knew exactly what you were up to.

But I was amazed at your contempt towards her for I never held her guilty for not reading Ambedkar. Never had any contempt because of it.

It was her choice. I am perfectly ok with it. Most Dalits would be too, I guess.

My only problem with her is when she calls the Dalit movement names without ever engaging with it.

And my contempt is only reserved for all those who because of their network power, resources and brahminical privileges rob Dalits of something they hold too dear..

To Friends

I have always avoided confrontations, always was being accused of running away, being diplomatic, not because I could not fight but because I knew it's all meaningless in the long run. Not today. Not against this blatant usurpation, appropriation of Dalit toil...

If I remain silent today, I would never be able to face myself ever..

I know my words have absolutely no power and will not even make a slight dent on these vicious brahminical upper caste publishers, Indian and foreign academicians, media nexus but I will be happy if a few of my friends are able to understand what I am trying to say..

It is not about Ms Roy per se, this much I can assure you..

~

I have more upper caste friends than the number of Dalits you would ever shake hands with in your entire life. So please do not talk crap..

To Friends

I am seriously thinking of a 10k words long article 'introducing' Arundhati Roy to the 'Dalit world' to return the favour we have been bestowed with by 'Ambedkar zealots' from across the world.

Actually, I started writing it long back when her article talking about all kinds of ghosts appeared in *Outlook*. But was mired in self doubts on whether this effort was worth it..

But always had a hunch that in her we have a new mahatma ready to be packaged and thrust on us anytime..

To self

History tells us that messiahs and messiah-producers are a bit touchy and a lot messy. Preparing myself for a long haul and much mess.

To Friends

Thanks for all the messages of concern and support. Needed them badly. And apologies for not being able to reply to them individually. Am using my mobile. And it's not that 'smart'. A bit difficult to type. Am glad I could draw the courage to take a stand against too powerful people. Would not have been possible without knowing that I have friends like you. Jai Bhim!

To Academics

Learnt a new thing tonight. You actually need Arundhati Roy to make north American white scholars start 'reading Ambedkar' and 'give up Gandhi'. As if they (north American white scholars) fucking matter in our struggle and we must be obliged and shut the fuck up.

I told you *na* we have a messiah among us .. A messiah along with her worldwide patrons who will deliver our unknown, unheard, unsung

leader's message across the seven seas.. To bring their benevolent gaze towards our wretched existence..

~

[Time to revisit what Phule wrote on receiving an invitation from 'social reform zealot' M.G. Ranade and 300 others like him to attend their Marathi writers' conference at Poona, May 24, 1885. Do read.]

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge the receipt of your letter regarding the proposed conference of the (Marathi) authors and I was delighted to receive your request that I should participate in this conference.

But then esteemed sir, the conferences and the books of those who refuse to think of human rights generally, who do not concede them to others and going by their behaviour are unlikely to concede them in future, cannot make sense to us, they cannot concur with what we are trying to say in our books...

These upper-caste authors who are forever miles away from reality and who can only make ceremonial and meaningless speeches in big meetings can never understand what we the shudras and atishudras have to suffer and what calamities we have to undergo.

All this is not entirely unknown to the high-caste founders of various conferences and organizations. They pretend to be modernists as long as they are in the service of the British government. The moment they retire and claim their pensions, they get into their brahminical touch-me-not attire, become caste chauvinists, incorrigible idol worshippers and, what is worse, treat the shudras and atishudras as lowly and contemptible. How can these Arya brahmans improve the lot of this unfortunate land?

Be that as it may. We shudras do not any longer wish to trust these people and their specious and dishonest stories, for they cheat us and eat off our labour. In a word, we shudras have nothing to gain by mixing with such

people. We must think about our situation and how we should relate to these upper-caste people...

Of course, they are free to do what they like. I would nevertheless be thankful if my short letter is placed before your conference for consideration. In any case accept the salute of this old man.

Your friend

Jotirao. G. Phule.

~

~ The '*Dnyanodaya*' (a newspaper) noted that the brahmin authors, editors in Maharashtra violently attacked this letter of Jotirao. Why did Jotirao not co-operate with the Marathi writers? Their ambitions, their world of imagination, novels, dramas and poetry hardly reflected the problems of the vast mass of people and their abject poverty. The Marathi plays mostly dealt with puranic themes and whatever social plays did was to reflect the problem of the higher classes. The writers boasted of their culture of which nine-tenths of their countrymen possessed not a whit! ~

[Dhananjay Keer in *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of Indian Revolution*][79]

This part is for Roy

*Mind you, 'puranic' is a very funny word here. Kindly do take note. Its meanings might change with time but the sum total of them being mere brahminical "ghost stories" remains the same. Always.

To Savarnas

I have always been abusive. And always will be. Never sugar coated it. Never felt the need to be polite about it. Have 'abused' Nandy, Guha,

79 Keer, Dhananjay. Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution. *Popular Prakashan, 1974.*

Binayak Sen, Nigam, Shuddhabrata and many many more on my wall, very publicly, since day one.

Roy is no different for me. If you are hurt over her but 'liked' my abusing others deal with it yourself. Not my bloody problem. Never invited anyone to read what I write.

To Navayana

I still have much much more to say. A lot to say actually. And am not going to hold myself back. Come what may. Am just waiting to see which way this 'debate' flows.

And this is nothing new. This has been our battle always.

If one follows the struggles of Babasaheb and Savitri mai-Jotiba Phule even a bit, one will understand their main struggle was always against the 'liberals' of their times whether they be Ranade or Gandhi - caste chauvinists who masqueraded always as liberals but remained the most potent bulwark, protecting Brahminism, maintaining status-quo - spouting forth all the right things but always instrumental in thwarting whatever efforts our leaders made towards our empowerment.

Today, I do not accuse them of merely distorting Ambedkar or appropriating him for their gains. I accuse them of being guilty of every rape, every murder, every atrocity, every indignity my community has suffered. While being busy in deciding (whether) to read Ambedkar or not. Even forcing each other on how to 'interpret' Ambedkar..

I accuse them of being directly responsible for every time I have suffered.

~

You need Omprakash Balmiki's *Jhootan*'s English version to know the caste horror. Need *Fandry* to get shocked. You required 60-70 years to discover Ambedkar..You also require your own high priestess to now interpret Ambedkar for you. To tell you what was right and wrong with Ambedkar. To force you to even start reading him..

How long this will go on man, just how long!

People are dying here, women are getting raped, children's dreams crushed in schools, our brilliant students committing suicides..

How long will it take you to understand the caste problem fully?

How long will it take for you to realise that you are no solution but part of the problem? Every bit of your existence?

You are being cruel, just too cruel, merely using our pain for your PhDs, for your academic careers, for commercial gains, to establish your *maha* revolutionary credentials and you want us to cheer for you, clap for you? Wait for you to join us some day from your high pulpits, from your ivory towers..??

You will get nothing from me ever except contempt .. Pure contempt.. I spit on you, on everything you stand on and for..

~

Our people have been fighting inch by inch in every village, every *wada*. And some of us are fortunate enough to reach up to your little cocoons that you have built in all high places, distancing yourself very coolly from the mess you and your forefathers created.... will now extend that fight inch by inch towards your doorsteps, in your face...in the language you understand..

My absence in those words

~ Yogesh Maitreya

I did not read Arundhati Roy's introduction to Navayana's edition of *Annihilation of Caste* and I am sure I do not need to read it. However, I have read and re-read *Annihilation of Caste*. The text of *AoC* itself introduces the exploitative nature and nuances of Brahmanic caste and of Brahmins in a straightforward language. Therefore, I believe, it does not need any Brahmin to introduce it.

The introduction to Dr Ambedkar was a childhood event for me (and many others like me, I am sure). An event in which I first discovered him as a larger than life figure. My grandmother used to take me to a *Buddha Vihara*, located at a stone's throw from our house in a Dalit settlement. In the *Buddha Vihara*'s interior, dimly lit with a few candles and filled with the soft fragrance of incense sticks, I used to monotonously recite Buddhist prayers. All the while, my eyes used to keep stealing glances at the tranquil face of the Buddha and at the picture next to him, of a man wearing a well-crafted western suit, with black-rimmed glasses. Listed underneath his photo were the academic degrees he had earned. Something I was often told by people there: *Babasaheb khup shikale hote, itkya digraya ghetalya tyanni* (Babasaheb had studied so much, he had so many degrees.) The name under the photo read: Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. These were the first few naïve glimpses I caught of Dr Ambedkar and his scholarship. I was about seven years old then.

But since no one in my family had the opportunity to pursue reading, we had no literature of his through which I could discover his intellect. All we had was Dr Ambedkar's lively photo. However, my parents and grandparents had an instinct about education. Despite tussling with economic penury for long periods of our lives, they always appreciated the quest for knowledge in my generation. So, whenever it came to education and studies, I was told: *Babasaheba sarakhe shika*, study like Babasaheb Ambedkar. Also, my grandmother used to narrate stories about Dr Ambedkar and his life which she had heard from other sources. In her stories, Dr Ambedkar used to appear as an angel, a saviour of Dalits on the one hand, and on the other, a man who despite going through

extreme pains and humiliations in the Brahminical and casteist society, studied extensively and liberated his people. These stories were powerful enough to give me goosebumps. So after all these years, Dr Ambedkar has become synonymous not only with academic scholarship but with a deep moral character.

This childhood introduction to Dr Ambedkar was an innocent one and it has carved an almost indelible space in my mind for Ambedkar. The Ambedkar of my childhood became much more extensive and profound through my growing up years. During my graduation days, in my frequent readings of him, and now as I pursue my Masters' degree, Dr Ambedkar has become an everyday reality with his critique of oppression of caste in India and his scholarly writings which deductively aim at liberation of all oppressed people. But more importantly Dr Ambedkar, unlike other scholars I have studied so far, is an incessant source of inspiration for me.

So in brief, this is how I had been introduced to Dr Ambedkar long before any misguiding introduction by Arundhati Roy. Clearly, Dr Ambedkar needs no introduction, not even for Brahmins, if they keep their eyes and ears open to face the truth spoken by Dalits. If Columbia University can pay heed to Dr Ambedkar's seminal text '*Annihilation of Caste*', then how come the Indian educated elite needs an introduction to Ambedkar's literature, that too in 2014, as claimed by the Arundhati Roy and her publisher S. Anand of Navayana? How can the Brahminical imagination of Dalit life not see the importance of Ambedkar all this while but now feels the need for a Brahmin to introduce *AoC*?

An attempt to maintain intellectual hegemony

I have been following the debates around the appropriation of Dr Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* for months now. I put forward a few of my own views on this issue. This exercise of writing the 'introduction' is clearly an attempt to extract philosophical royalty by usurping the epistemology of subaltern castes and sidelining subalterns from the platform of caste debates. All this without engaging with the Dalit movement and struggle, and suddenly incarnating herself as their messiah. Thus attempting to take over the discourse of annihilation of caste. Such people never pose any substantial arguments against hegemony of their

own Brahminical lineage that is mainly responsible for the creation and sustenance of the caste disease.

Moreover, the new annotated version of '*Annihilation of Caste*' (*AoC*) with an introduction by Arundhati Roy and published by Navayana creates the newest version of ecclesiastical authorship (vedic in the Indian context). It follows the age-old vedic tradition of imposing hegemonic authorship on all subjects of social significance. Thus undermining Dalit literary imagination by selling Brahmanic literary debates on Dalit issues and creating a space for the Brahmins and savarnas in which the glory of being an intellectual on Dalit subjects can be enjoyed at various international platforms.

But that is not all. The efforts invested by the Arundhati-Anand project in the appropriation of *AoC* are composed of subtle nuances. They are also psychological when one looks at them in the context of the Brahmanic literary imagination of Dalit life/subjects.

Over the past six decades, Dr Ambedkar has not only become an inspiration for Dalits in their academic pursuits but also stands as a symbol of assertion, and typifies their aspirations to live with dignity and strive for humane conditions in this casteist society. Then, how is it possible that Ambedkar has remained un-introduced to the so-called 'educated' people? If Ambedkar's literature needs an introduction in India and especially to the community of the so-called educated elite (as the Arundhati-Anand project claims) even 58 years after his demise, then this raises a serious question. And this doubt can be cleared and elaborated by interrogating the Brahmanic literary imagination, its cultural hegemony, and the power lust of Brahmanism.

According to the Vedas, Brahmins are the only ones vested with the authority to pursue intellectual quests in the social domain. This automatically plants the notion of being 'born intellectual' in them, which is further nurtured by their caste position. Consequently this becomes their subconscious anchor in all social arguments. But in post-independence India, vedic authority was replaced by the Constitution, thereby providing every citizen the right to pursue intellectual activity regardless of their caste.

This hit the Brahminical hegemony like a catastrophic cyclone which uprooted their empire of intellectual temples. The Brahmin's ego was shattered. The desire to maintain their old (vedic) hegemony, without annihilating their Brahmin-ness, has thus become almost an essential agenda for them. This desire to continue intellectual hegemony makes them deploy new means all the time. Now, they insert themselves in the democratic affairs of the country to hold on to the label of *intellectual caste*. Here the ego of the Brahmin literary imagination deploys all possible ways to be the saviour of Dalits without acknowledging their own Brahmanic-illiteracy of the empiricism of Dalit life.

Earlier, I had indicated that the motives behind the introduction by Arundhati Roy are far subtler than to just appropriate the text of *AoC*. I argue that, if proper efforts can be invested in investigating her objectives in writing an introduction to *AoC*, then the attempts to appropriate Dalit empiricism through literary imagination of Brahmins in India can be established as a pathological enterprise. The previous counter arguments in a number of articles by a range of people from different caste locations published in *Round Table India* tried to define for us the mechanism of appropriation of Dalit texts by Brahmins.

In constant contradiction: Brahmanic and Dalit intellectual forces

One reason behind this is that both these forces, Brahmanic and Dalit, are in constant contradiction with each other. The former is trying to almost establish the universal rule of their scholarship through their intellectual hegemony whereas the latter endeavours to overthrow Brahmanic hegemony to attain the vision of hegemony-less domains, asserting the potential to create new knowledge and discourses which so far was undermined by the cultural violence against Dalits.

The oppressive nature of the Brahmanic caste in Indian discourses has always been shrouded in a well-maintained silence, especially in the media and literary circles. Dr Ambedkar was perhaps the first scholar who exposed caste explicitly as political, social and economic oppression. He consistently attacked caste till the end of his scholarly life, where he identified the Brahmin caste as the oppressor and highlighted its exploitative social position. Therefore, without substantially criticising

her own hegemonic caste position, Arundhati Roy overlooks the need for internal critique of her own caste privilege and goes on to completely misunderstand and misinterpret the text of '*Annihilation of Caste*'.[80]

Another facet of this act of appropriation by Arundhati Roy points us towards cultural violence against Dalits by the Brahmin literary imagination. Most of their literary efforts end up undermining Dalits through their Brahmanic interpretations of Dalit lives. And this is in open contradiction to the objectives of *AoC*.

As Brahmins and Savarnas in India control all the resources and spaces of discourses and opinions such as media and publishing houses, they influence the opinion of the public on most subjects. In Arundhati Roy's case the subject is caste. It is impossible that the aforementioned fact was unknown to Arundhati Roy, but her actions indicate only her deliberate attempts to offer the misleading interpretation of Ambedkar and *AoC* to the upper castes as well as future scholars of caste. This deliberate attempt can only be defined as the attack of her Brahmanic consciousness on the spaces of Dalits in their own discourses and interpretations of their lives, while taking sadistic pleasure out of calling their spaces as 'insult machines'.

Jaat

Aaj kelas katla majha
Pustake hi dastak det hoti,
Mi shabd wachat hoto
Mi sabdat kuthehi navhato,
Mituni shewatache paan aata
Mi katl majhach pahat hoto

--

Today you kill me
this book is evidence,
I only see words

80 Shanmugavelan, Murali. On how Arundhati Roy introduces AoC without losing her upper hand, 25th April, 2014. *Round Table India*. Available at: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7400:on-how-arundhati-roy-introduces-aoc-without-losing-her-upper-hand&catid=119:feature&Itemid=13 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

my absence in those words,
Shutting the big book
I witness my own murder

Arundhati Roy and Priyanka Chopra: The politics of authentic nationhood

~ Thongam Bipin

Racism is a form of discrimination that is based on race, physical features and region. Like any other form of discrimination, whether, gender, caste or sexual orientation, racism is deeply rooted in our psyche, in our national collective imagination. Collectivity here implies homogeneity, common feelings. Racism involves power and dominance. Any difference or variations from such a collective would be/are met with a firm hand. They need to be contained, tamed, and controlled. Our collective imagination (nation) is discriminatory in nature.

Priyanka Chopra donning the role of Mary Kom in the movie of the same title underscores such deep-rooted collective imagination.[81] At a time when the Indian state is struggling to curb the growing insensitivity and violence against the Northeast (NE) in various parts of the country, this movie instead of making a right/bold move has taken a safer route, because of the fear of the (dominant) collective. This raises questions that need to be answered, or at least makes us ask ourselves - *why the Northeast cannot represent itself?* Is it because there is no bankable star from the region, culturally, monetarily? Or, is there something more to this? Is NE untranslatable as Indian? Do they remain as non-Indian in the collective imagination of the nation? The non-Indian, or yet to become Indian category/tag is a strong point of engagement with the rest of India. This reflects in the selection of Priyanka Chopra over actors/persons from the region, who should have been the obvious choice.

The larger question of representation, as it gets more and more complicated, should be critically looked at in this case as well. The privileged should reflect on why marginalized communities are questioning their representations of the latter. Do such representations, which are most often patronizing, reinforce the same pattern of oppression of voices of

81 Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom, also known as MC Mary Kom, is an Indian boxer. She won a bronze medal in the 2012 Olympics. In September 2014, a biopic *Mary Kom* was released on the boxer's life. The lead role was played by popular Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra.

the marginalized? *Why does Sanjay Leela Bhansali have to recruit Priyanka Chopra, who in no way looks like Mary Kom and who is not from the region?* Does it open up the fear of hurting the sentiments of the nation, or, is it because of the bankability at the box office? If it is a question of box office collections, it needs to be explained why Bhansali assumes that the nation would be unwilling to spend the same amount of money to go to the theatre and watch some other actor from the NE, who would be closer to reality, doing the role of Mary Kom? Why is it that the nation is stingy about spending money on an NE person but not on Priyanka? The ticket that we buy is determined by various factors like stardom, popularity etc. But I would assume that Mary Kom is a different case altogether. It is not a movie about Priyanka Chopra, it is about Mary Kom.

Actors can play any roles. If this is the line of argument, I lose here. The artistic freedom in/of representation is inflicting another injury on the region - a region, a community that has been a victim of state sponsored violence and discrimination. India is, since a long time, talking about assimilation and emotional integration of the region with the rest of India. If this is how one goes about the process of integration, through Priyanka Chopra, are we forcefully integrating the region or disintegrating it? The (token) representation that was given in *Chak de India* could have been avoided then. The roles of the two NE girls should have been played by somebody from mainstream India. The producers just needed to give them NE names. That would do.

The Hindi film industry or Bollywood, that re/manufactures nation, caste, class, region etc., thus provides us a glimpse of what the Indian nation is. Priyanka Chopra becomes an enabling body for the production of, and imagining the Indian nation, and not anyone from the NE. Homogeneity, cultural and racial assimilation are achieved through a Chopra, not a Kom. The Hindi film industry that has taken upon itself to represent India, could not find an able and 'meritorious' person from the region to do the role of Mary Kom. It is only in a Chopra that India can imagine its nationhood. This reminds us of many academic seminars, books published, articles written, plays staged, commissions formed, but with no one on the stage from NE on the panel. There is a systematic denial of self-representation to the people of the NE.

Priyanka as Mary Kom and the introduction of Ambedkar by Arundhati Roy, function in the same manner. Though the issue has been discussed extensively in *Round Table India*, I would like to reiterate one point: *why does the Indian nation need a Roy to introduce Ambedkar and get a better acquaintance with the text?* I am not comparing Ambedkar and Mary Kom here, but it is not surprising to see how these cases work in a similar pattern. India will read untouchable Ambedkar only after a Roy purifies him and then read him through the eyes of a Roy. In a similar fashion, Mary Kom, requires a proxy, a Chopra, to be accepted on the silver screen. She requires purification, a racial purification. And, this purification is performed through the figure of a Chopra. The figure of Priyanka Chopra rinses away the NE, but the name Mary Kom remains. She saves the nation from adulteration. The nation wants just the incredible story of Mary Kom, and her achievement, her medal, but not her, not her people. *If this is not racism, what is it?*

Arundhati Roy—Homeless Nomad and Urban Legend

~ K K Baburaj

As 'modernity' emerged as a literary device in Kerala, the mythological character 'Ashwathama' came to be widely discussed. He was eulogized as a symbol who transcends time and space, his life held up as exemplifying the 'other', the model life-style of someone who, despite being banished by the system, refused to give in. A novel about him by the same name, written by Madambu Kunjukuttan, was later made into a movie by K. R. Mohanan. Needless to say, both won literary and Filmfare awards respectively.

There is a hegemonic nature to the variety of modernity that re-invents such legends: the 'social' is interpreted in the realm of masculine savarna fantasy, de-linked from real places and communities. The claims of universality of this modernity would be revealed as hollow if one were to ask this question: "Is the Brahminic power that Ashwathama sought to re-establish superior to the rule of the Kshatriyas that he claims to have rejected?" Important to note here is that Ashwathama has **not** been valorized by those who challenged the *Varnashrama dharma* and its resultant Brahmin-Kshatriya hegemony from a subaltern (*keezhalar*) gender-sensitive perspective. This is simply because of their conviction that it is unjust to counter the violence of the established system with further violence.

I write this in relation to the controversy that Arundhati Roy kick-started through her criticism of Gandhi in Thiruvananthapuram.

Arundhati Roy is a high-profile anti-establishment intellectual who carries star value, one who endorses alternative logics and views, and has consequently received much media attention. Some of her comments at the inauguration of the Ayyankali chair in the University of Kerala were interpreted as maligning Gandhi, and were followed by protests and threats of legal action against her. Unleashing criticism of the Congress and BJP leaders, and other prominent people in the higher echelons of power, is a function of her unique positioning, one that Arundhati

routinely fulfills. It is therefore safe to assume that she expects opposition to her views. This time around, it was argued that her views on Gandhi precipitated a cultural emergency of sorts. In fact, the controversy over her remarks was designed to enhance her media presence. Her criticism of Gandhi made news with imaginatively embellished headlines and unsurprisingly, her supporters cried hoarse that she was being victimized.

In this entire ruckus, what many failed to notice were certain changes that were outside the media's interest, those that appeared in the social scheme of things.

A good number of people in this society are closed-minded enough to believe that savarnas are the only legitimate producers of knowledge. These are people who are so thoroughly enslaved by public opinion that they take notice only when Arundhati criticises Gandhi, and critiques from other corners do not register in their consciousness. Similarly, there are many who harbor caste/sub-caste mentality within Dalits themselves. The Dalit discourse in Kerala poses significant challenges to such groups of people. A few media romantics aside, these were the very people who could not recognize the conventionality in Arundhati's criticism. The net effect was that as a result of supporting Arundhati, many people who would otherwise be in the same league as the defenders of Gandhi, or of those who threaten legal action against criticism of Gandhi, came to appear as supporters of the Dalit cause too.

This onboarding process has to be probed in greater detail.

A major weakness of the Ambedkarite discourses that developed in Kerala in the mid-1980s was that they focused on a single point, anti-Gandhi agenda. However, new ideological and political subjectivity emerged in the Dalit community following continued engagement with such a restrictive stance, and constant struggles for a corrective change. Instead of holding individuals responsible for the situation of Dalits, these struggles located the root of the problems in the existing political and power structures, and traced it to the historical process of development of communities and the nation. With this shift in Dalit discourse, simplistic and conventional anti-Gandhi, anti-savarna, anti-Marxist positions were abandoned for analysis that foregrounds critical thinking. Alongside, there were active

discussions about the need to re-formulate Dalit struggles, debates, and alliances taking cognizance of the newly acquired social mobility of Dalits, experienced in the previous two or three decades.

Reformulation of Dalit agency entails not merely a lot of de-construction, but also much reclamation. However, the changes in the Dalit discourse in the ways mentioned above came to be reduced as neo-elite intellectual discourses, which were then easily viewed as illegible articulations of intellectuals disconnected with realities of ordinary lives. Unable to confront such a complex development in the Dalit discourse, Arundhati Roy could speak only to those who were still stuck in the earlier arguments of the 1980s.

Criticism of Gandhi: the background

In the same venue where Arundhati Roy unleashed her criticism of Gandhi, a prominent Dalit intellectual, Sunny M Kappicadu, had pointed out the lack of logic in comparing Gandhi with Ayyankali. He had warned that such a comparison could only render Ayyankali irrelevant while simultaneously ensuring the continued relevance of the controversial figures of both Arundhati and Gandhi. It is now obvious that this was what precisely happened.

Meanwhile, what we should be keenly aware of is the fact that Arundhati's Gandhi-criticism was not incidental.

The Delhi-based publishing house called Navayana republished Dr Ambedkar's seminal text, *Annihilation of Caste*. The annotations made in the text by the publisher Anand, and the introduction to the text by Arundhati Roy, were publicized as unique features of this book. The introduction by Arundhati was published independently, with much ado by two Indian corporate media houses. Based on this introduction, some questions were posed to Arundhati Roy by '*Dalit Camera*', an activist group comprising a group of Dalit and non-Dalit students in Hyderabad. Most of the questions expressed dissatisfaction in the traditional conservative position taken by Arundhati in comparing Gandhi and Ambedkar as equals. They also questioned her right to write an introduction to a work

as pivotal as the *AoC*, and her capacity – as a writer or scholar - from which she drew this right to represent.

As the introduction to *AoC* became more widely read, strong protests were registered not just from Dalit quarters but also from the new generation of savarnas and avarnas, Muslim and Christian intellectuals, researchers and activists. Following this development, *The Hindu* newspaper came out with a false propaganda that Dalits are stopping Arundhati Roy from writing about Ambedkar because she is non-Dalit, a savarna. Behind this move was a clear liberal left-wing logic which sought to reduce all Dalit critiques as operation of a casteist mentality. But what were the facts? There are so many savarna women in the academia who engage with caste and Dalit issues. The allegation that Arundhati Roy was singled out and ostracized for her caste, while the same kind of casteist ostracization was not experienced by researchers like Uma Chakravorty, Nivedita Menon, Susie Tharu or Gail Omvedt has surely been designed with malicious intent.

It is as clear as daylight that Arundhati Roy was not attacked by casteist groups. Even so, why is there a general consensus that favours the malicious propaganda that asserts the opposite?

A critique of the savarnas, especially high-profile savarnas, by the subaltern people tends to get portrayed in the media as a process of victimization. The critiques themselves are viewed as an onslaught by the uncivilized. As in the case of Ashis Nandy when his flawed generalization of corruption was pointed out, or in the case of Kamal Hassan when his movie 'Vishwaroopam' was heavily critiqued, both the media and the savarna public conscience worked to protect these individuals and preserve their stardom. This protection afforded to the savarnas is the precise explanation as to why the ideological violence of Gandhi and EMS Namboodiripad, recognized much earlier for what it is, did not become topics of larger public debates. The same protection available to Arundhati Roy allowed her critiques to be conveniently categorized as narrow-minded casteism.

When the politics of general consensus that includes people like Arundhati Roy, whether knowingly or unknowingly, is exposed by the subaltern

groups, it is countered with allegations without factual basis by liberal Marxist writers like Anand Teltumbde. This cannot be a co-incidence.

Early communists of India propagated the notion that Dr Ambedkar was an agent of imperialism who sabotaged the class revolution that they were planning. The same logic is being employed by Anand Teltumbde in his assessment of Dalit intellectuals, and the new generation of social commentators and activists, as neo-elites who obstruct the anti-corporate liberatory crusade of Arundhati Roy. The open letter by *Dalit Camera* activists questions both the ethics and the scholarship that Arundhati has to engage with a text like the *AoC*. Teltumbde's reply to this query is that the publisher of the book does good business from Arundhati's fame. What the students and critics only wanted to point out was that Arundhati Roy's study should have been published as a separate book instead of making it an introduction to a seminal text like the *AoC*.

In short, the rationale for her reiterating the comments about Gandhi in Trivandrum was a strategic move: to ensure that the criticism that her work elicited from the new generation of Dalit intellectuals and scholars at the national level did not surface at the regional level in Kerala.

Homeless nomad, Urban Legend

As the *AoC* controversy gained in strength, some wondered whether an international celebrity like Arundhati Roy discussing Dr Ambedkar couldn't be viewed as opening up of new possibilities. What should be noted here is that the politics of representation is an important and necessary part of not just the anti-caste struggles and debates, but also those of women and other minorities as well. Historically, the marginalized sections have expanded their space through several democratic means – by critiquing the system, by forcing hegemonic power structures to de-centralize, and by relentlessly working within the system to change it. Dalits rejected the Gandhian mission to uplift Harijans and the Marxian attempts to patronize, and similar to how many feminists have rejected the patched-up variety called socialist feminism, not because the progenitors of these ideas were less famous, but on the contrary, Dalits rejected these

attempts because subjecthood and representation is a crucial component of subaltern politics.

Let alone representing the subaltern, Arundhati Roy is far away from any sort of representation that bears any resemblance to the subaltern. In any case, the international repute she enjoys is not founded on any position she has taken that is representative of either women, or any marginalized people. While she is steeped in epithets like 'the voice of the voiceless', it does not appear that she had to deal with and surmount the complications and difficulties that the subaltern experience in their attempts to find their voice.

Her writings and talks confirm that her 'alternative' vision about the state, civil society institutions and formation of culture are in tune with the ideas endorsed by upper caste men and white men. This vision has to be recognized as the by-product of a hegemonic Euro-centric dialectic. It cannot be inclusive of diversity, nor can it recognize plurality. Across the world, marginalized people have problematized the politics of representation by toppling this dialectical logic. Precisely because she perceives as a 'horror' this toppling and the appearance of diverse actors, she has a need to glorify the Brahminic Fascism called Maoism which has enjoyed the protective shade of Marxists.

Thus, the international reputation of Arundhati Roy whose politics represents the polar opposite of subaltern politics will not serve to amplify, but to silence the voices of the marginalized.

The transformation of anti-caste leaders like Ambedkar into popular national figures, and the slow but steady spread and acceptance of their ideas by the masses are waves of an impending social revolution. These indicate the operationalization of the collective will of the oppressed. The sudden visibility of Arundhati Roy and the celebration of her book is a different story altogether.

While Arundhati claims to be a sworn enemy of the corporates, it is ironical that her fame and relevance is fully dependent on, and to a great deal determined by the corporate media houses. From the early descriptions of her fans to her current Wikipedia page, she is presented as

a homeless rag picker making her living on the streets of Calcutta, giving her a nomad's image. While she enjoyed all the symbolic capital afforded to her by her caste privilege, and the material rewards of the capitalist system, this gypsy girl image served to give the impression that she was self-made, coming up the hard way.

A closer look reveals Arundhati as an urban legend, drawing validation from the fantasies of the urbanized upper class, and their rejection of identity of the marginalized woman. This bears similarity to the reification of Gandhi. Shahid Amin reveals that much before he earned the sobriquet of the 'Naked Fakir', the educated savarna elite and the business class in India had decided upon his status as a legend. Arguably, the part of Arundhati's introduction that communicates the best is the one where she elaborates upon the 'Mahatma' status of Gandhi. It is rather unfortunate that the caste and class powers that constructed this Gandhi image are the same ones that moulded Arundhati Roy.

Scholarship or super-ego?

By the 1980's the subaltern groups of India started working towards gaining political presence. The flutters that this caused in the national consciousness, is a matter of common knowledge. What I would like to consider here is the approach that the 'alternative' political movements and the radical left-wing parties adopted towards these emergent subaltern assertions.

The present socio-political system has experienced a thorough degeneration under neo-colonial invasions. For the subaltern to aspire for political power within this system would only make them party to this state of degeneration. Recognizing this, they put forward an alternative politics disinterested in power and interested in being a live presence critiquing capitalist forces.

Non-brahminic streams of knowledge or anti-caste struggles are practically non-existent in the 'alternative' literature of the 1980s. Instead there is much revelry in the glorious past of the nationalist movements, and celebration of the ideas of Gandhi and Mao. In short, the themes in

the popular 'alternative' literature of these times did not pay attention to the subaltern politics of resisting neo-colonialism carved out by the broad Bahujan sections, and instead, centred on the anxieties that capitalism induced in certain liberal sections of the society. Naturally, the 'alternative' politics of that time held no charm for the subaltern politics that stressed upon the possibilities and problems of the bourgeois democracy in India.

All that Arundhati Roy's recent activist stint has accomplished is to rid these 'alternatives' of their liberal anxieties, and re-cast them within a feudal sub-conscious and a savarna super-ego. The introduction to *AoC* should be recognized as a part of this overbearing one-sided activism.

In fact, the propagators of the earlier 'alternative' politics, under the excuse of countering neo-colonialism, sidelined the marginalized and denied them opportunities for political participation. Quite in line with this politics, in the name of corporatization, Arundhati Roy refutes the post-modern politics of diversity and deprives the subaltern and minority people of their agency.

Mocking Gandhi as a 'saint' and depicting Ambedkar as a 'doctor' (a medical practitioner) itself reveals an approach stuck in a 'feudal' sub-consciousness where the society needs curing and caring for. In any case, Ambedkar's relevance today is not as a substitute for the saint who failed to deliver his magic, and in whose place a qualified doctor was needed.

Ambedkar's '*Annihilation of Caste*' is an essay that influenced prominent public personalities, many subaltern resistances in post-modern India, and millions of ordinary people. As a result of vibrant activities in the lowest strata of the society, this text has been translated into all Indian languages. The popularity of this text can be compared only with the popularity enjoyed by certain texts of the earlier *Bhakti* movement. For the very first time since the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the hegemonic Brahminic knowledge sphere of India was surmounted. It might even be that the epistemological basis for countering Kant and Hegel was formulated in this text. What was Arundhati Roy's approach to this complex text? Why was Arundhati not able to pen a single word that traced the history of publication of this text, or its history post-publication? Let alone shining light on its authentic contribution and epistemological worth.

What sets apart Ambedkar's *AoC* from the many books about the caste system written by Indian and foreign scholars alike and lends it its lofty stature is the visionary nature of this text. While others tried to interpret the caste system by understanding division of labour, through anthropological studies, or through livelihood studies, the visionary strength of *AoC* is derived from the genealogical understanding of formation of Hindu caste communities, located in the history of religious conflicts and their evolution. Arundhati Roy reasserts the mistaken notion that Dr Ambedkar was freed from Western Liberal framework after he converted to Buddhism. In fact, *Annihilation of Caste* is the first text that explores the condition of being 'marginalized' outside of the liberal-Marxist framework.

For this text that runs less than a hundred pages, Arundhati Roy has come up with an introduction of over 165 pages. Stranger is the fact that in the whole of this introduction, references to the core *AoC* text is barely half a paragraph. What little reference there is fails miserably in conveying its philosophical and ideological import.

It would have been commendable, had Arundhati tried to interpret the facts that are already well-known to researchers and scholars in a novel manner; instead she reiterates them like a tourist guide. This too contributes to the opposition to her work, apart from the fact that she has attempted an unnecessary comparison of Gandhi to Ambedkar.

She depicts Dalits only as those who do menial jobs, and as victims of modern India. The victimhood of Dalits is firmly established by long-winded explanations stretching from the murder of Surekha Bhotmange and her children in Khairlanji to the community background of sanitation workers in the country. Several studies and national and international reports are furnished as evidence for this fact. Undoubtedly, there is widespread violence against Dalits and lower-caste women in India. To tie down into a narrative of victimhood, a people who engage in complex occupations and diverse cultural acts is not the posture of mutuality. This reminds one of the early colonial travelers who described the native people in narratives that denied them their subjecthood.

A critical insight was offered by Toni Morrison when she said that Black people should not be understood through the narratives of white people. She also adds that the racist repesentations of the Black people as a people without agency has been achieved by erasure of their struggles and sufferings which shaped the proud legacies of the modern United States such as the civil rights movement, modern civil institutions, and their modern cultural symbols. It is unfortunate that Arundhati engages in comparable acts of erasure.

Ambedkar has written in the *AoC* that within the nationalist movement, the members of Political Conference harbored animosity towards the members of the Social Conference. Similarly, it is the savarna egoists who harbor deep-rooted animosity towards the Indian constitution and its civil institutions who appear as romantic revolutionaries and anti-corporate champions. Arundhati joins the league of such people. Her arguments to justify her stand against the state and democratic institutions are in the same vein as Godse's arguments were for assassination of Gandhi. What propels her to identify with neo-Brahminic groups like the Maoists is this savarna super-ego that transforms the indigenous people as the 'intimate Other'. It has to be asserted that the ideology Arundhati reproduces is not the pursuit of justice of Ekalavya, but the 'alternative' violent 'other' of Ashwathama.

Finally, all the new social movements in India after the 1980s – the subaltern movements, feminist movement, minority politics, human rights and civil rights movements, environmental politics, and movements of the sexual minorities – have questioned the claims of homogeneity ingrained in the alternative/radical postures. Through her works such as the *Broken Republic*, all these assertions have been reduced as shallow and thoughtless by Arundhati Roy, and taken home to roost in the paternalistic Maoist household. Where the media and academia hesitate to expose this invitation for a neo-Brahminic invasion, the students and activists of *Dalit Camera* have kick-started a brave and radical re-thinking.

Translated from Malayalam by ***Sruthi Herbert****.*

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The battle against caste is not just some ideology, it's our existence

~ Gaurav Somwanshi

I have spent most of my twenty-four years in Aurangabad. I studied in a convent school where my friends were a mixed group from all castes and communities. Though we were never conscious of it back then, and it's only in retrospect that I am saying this, but we were all growing up differently. We were walking on increasingly divergent roads, shaped, more than anything else, by our locations of caste, class, and religion.

Almost all of us who spoke Marathi had read Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjay* and Veena Gavankar's *Ek hota Carver* before we turned 15. But it was at home that I got to read something which others didn't or couldn't, the writings of Babasaheb Ambedkar and some significant works of Dalit literature. And that was to shape me differently from my savarna friends in the time to come.

Babasaheb, though, was introduced to me long before I had read his works; we had a salutation, "Jai Bhim", his portrait adorned our living room, and April 14 was the day of the biggest celebration in our community. But outside of this familiar world, an unsettling surprise awaited me. It came when I discussed Babasaheb Ambedkar's works with my savarna school friends and got to know that none of them had even seen his books, let alone read them. They had also not read or even heard of Narendra Jadhav's *Aamcha baap ani amhi* or Bhalchandra Mungekar's *Mi asa ghadalo,* my favourite books back then.

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Anyone visiting a bookstore would notice how they arrange and keep the books in a certain way, a neat division of genres and subjects. All books that make their way to such bookshops have their own designated places to fit into. But growing up in a Dalit middle class family in the city of Aurangabad, I also noticed that bookshops themselves are not *neutral*;

certain kinds of books can be found in some and not in others, a division, a stark one, that was again underlined by caste, as we will see.

Our city had just one big English bookstore, Quadrangle, and a couple of Marathi bookstores that were large and famous enough for everybody to know. The English bookstore seemed to have "everything"- from Carl Sagan to Sidney Sheldon, and Amartya Sen to Douglas Adams. But they did not have a single book by Ambedkar or any Dalit or anti-caste literature, even though much of it is and has been available in English too. The publishers were also the usual ones – Penguin, Vintage, Oxford, Rupa etc.

But there were also these dozen or so bookshops, peppered throughout the city, where my father and uncle would take me to even as I was a child. A couple of these were not the usual brick and mortar bookstores but mobile book stalls that could be easily moved from one place to the other on a handcart. Then there were, what I like to call, "book festivals"- April 14, December 6, *Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din*, when the streets of Aurangabad, especially the Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University road, would be lined with book stalls, and you could see the road paved with thousands of books. The books I found here could not be found elsewhere. I knew a few of the book stall owners personally as they were from my community and in fact some of my own relatives even ran these small publishing houses.

I blamed this dichotomy for being the main reason for my friends' ignorance of Babasaheb Ambedkar and Dalit literature. Consequently, I always felt that unless and until Quadrangle also started stocking these books, my friends, and others like them, might never read Babasaheb or Dalit and anti-caste literature. Once when I did urge the staff at the big bookstore to keep some books on or by Babasaheb, I was told that they did have one book on him and it turned out to be Arun Shourie's '*Worshipping False Gods*', and in fact two copies at that!

When I visited a couple of large and famous Marathi bookstores in the heart of the city, I was simply told "not available" or, the more revealing "not sold here".

The diverging roads that my friends and I were on continued to diverge further. During my management course at IIM Lucknow, I made some remarkable friends, and many of them came from the best institutes in the country. Again, among those of us who loved to read, there were some "obviously-already-read" books – Ramachandra Guha, George Orwell, Albert Camus, Chomsky, Nabokov, Christopher Hitchens etc. And yet again, Babasaheb Ambedkar remained both largely unread, and even worse: largely misunderstood. And the blame I had placed on the savarna bookstores and publishers kept on increasing in my head.

But some questions naturally popped up: Why this dichotomy in the different kinds of bookstores and publishers that I encountered? Is it simply Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'? Or, maybe, it was Manu's echoing chants that were causing this? Can the Dalit struggle survive or prosper further if it is not offered a 'helping' hand by the powerful elite? Will it be a revolution in itself if I were to see Babasaheb's books in my city's Quadrangle store? Will that be a "victory" in some sense? Why don't the Dalit publishers go and seek out these places? Surely they must try or want it?

But the answers to these worrying questions were not to be found by theorizing in my head. I could seek them only by talking to Dalit publishers/bookstore owners of Aurangabad. And so I did.

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Aamhan ghari dhan shabdanchich ratne | Shabdanchich shastreyatna karu ||
Shabd chi aamuchya jeevanche jeevan | Shabde vaatoo dhanjanlokaa ||
Tuka mhane paaha shabd chi ha dev | Shabd chi gaurav-puja karu ||

We possess the wealth of words,
With weapons of words we will fight;

Words are the breath of our life,
We will distribute the wealth of words among the people

Tukaram says that the words themselves are gods, our pride,
only those we choose to worship.

~ Sant Tukaram[82]

My first destination was *Kaushalya Prakashan*, one of the biggest names in Dalit publishing in Marathi. Its founder Dr Ashok Gaikwad also runs an ENT clinic alongside his publishing work. He works in the clinic for six hours daily and devotes the rest of his time to publishing. On many occasions one will find him travelling with a Tempo full of books to Nagpur, Dadar, Pune etc., whenever and wherever the "book festivals" take place.

Kaushalya was founded in 1995, and since then it has published over 300 titles, including Babasaheb's '*Annihilation of Caste*', 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', and the works of a host of other Dalit scholars and researchers. Dr Ashok Gaikwad had been my father's classmate in medical college, and they both had marched shoulder to shoulder in the *Naamantar struggle*[83] that lasted for over 16 years and also saw an anti-Dalit pogrom.

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82 Tukaram. Bhalchandra Nemade. *Sahitya Akademi*, Delhi, 1997.

83 *In the words of Suryankant Waghmore: "The Namantar movement is a critical event in the history of Dalit assertion in Marathwada, and evokes memories of large-scale political violence against Dalits. It refers to the Dalit demand for Namantar of Marathwada University to Dr Ambedkar University. Namantar mobilisation and political violence lasted for fifteen years (1979-1994) costing Dalits, especially the Mahars, loss of lives and property as the upper castes, mostly Marathas, attacked the Dalits in the villages."*
(Source: 'Civility against Caste: Dalit Politics and Citizenship in Western India' by Suryakant Waghmore, *Sage Publication*, 2013)
To read more on the movement, go to:

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c. To read more about the violence against Dalits during Namantar struggle, refer to
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3) Vakil, A.K. 'Reservation Policy and Scheduled Castes in India. *Ahshish Publishing House*, 1985

I would often land up at his bookstore to buy books and would always be given discounts, but this time I came to him with something else to ask for.

I visited Dr Gaikwad during his clinic hours, and as I sat in the waiting room while he was busy with a patient, I could see that the waiting room functioned as a *godown* of sorts as well. The corners of the room were stacked with books, and I could easily spot a dozen copies of Gail Omvedt's '*Building The Ambedkar Revolution*' among them. Although I would have loved to indefinitely wait in such a room staring at the stack of books, I was called in just as the patient left. Dr Gaikwad, with a stethoscope and pen in hand, welcomed me warmly, as always.

"Jai Bhim, Sir"

"Jai Bhim, Gaurav. How are you?"

The clinic seemed to be a perfect setting for this conversation because like a patient I presented my doubts, confusions, and concerns to him, and like a doctor he offered and shared with me his experiences and thoughts.

"Forget these Aurangabad bookstores you are talking about, I even went to the bookstores in 'Appa Balwant Chowk' of Pune in my initial years when I was as naïve as you. I offered them 40% margin, as is the standard rate there, and also assured them of regular demand. But along with awkward stares and annoyed looks, I got the response "we don't have any shelf space left". Some were more direct, "we don't keep such books". And what was I selling to them? Books by Babasaheb, books on the cultural tradition of Dalits, research by Dalit scholars on our history and tradition. But these books were untouchable for them."

When I asked more about the demand, he replied that in our Dalit community, irrespective of income, the demand for Dalit literature is always great. To explain this point, he offered an example that I was already familiar with but had never analysed deeply. He explained how among Dalits, a person may be running a small shop, or might be an auto-rickshaw driver, or one may be a nurse, but in a conversation they can easily talk of Ambedkarite struggles, Gandhi, Nehru, Marx, current politics, capitalism, and a lot more.

I was reminded of how even a performance of a *Shahir* is less about entertainment and more about *prabodhan*, awakening. Shahir Aniruddha Bankar performed at a 3-day 'Bhimotsav' organised in Aurangabad for Babasaheb's birth anniversary this year, and he gave an enlightening experience to an audience of around five thousand people - songs interspersed with history lessons, and the main thrust was on urging young girls to take up preparation for civil services.

This reality, this diversity that Dr Gaikwad mentioned was something I observe daily around me. And to contrast this, I also observe how even the supposedly "progressive" mainstream Marathi newspapers will try to paint a picture that the Dalits are a dull lot of people with no intellect. A year ago, the *Indian Express* group's *Loksatta*, famous for its "progressive" stand, republished an old article by Narahar Kurundkar[84] which implied that Dalits are intellectually a sterile lot, along with many other rubbish and awful things. This was republished on April 14, 2013 too, of all days!

To illustrate how vibrant the debates and discussions in Dalit spaces can be, Dr Gaikwad shared another telling anecdote with me. He told me that sometimes Dalit authors whom he published are reluctant to include their phone numbers in their books, and just give their email ids, because they know that they will be bombarded with people's calls to discuss issues directly with the author. This is something I remembered even from my own family. When my uncle, Prof B.C. Somwanshi, published an article on the alarming rise in caste atrocities in the Marathi Dalit newspaper *Samrat*, he was busy for a few days answering phone calls of people who wanted to discuss his article with him.

All of the above is made possible because it is only in such spaces that true democracy and egalitarianism thrives. Whether you're a man or a woman, young or old, rich or poor, your voice will never be stifled. For example, it is only in such spaces that you can clearly declare that you're a complete Marxist and disagree with Ambedkar, and still be the chief guest at Dalit conferences. Given these realities around me to ask if there

84 Narahar Kurundkar, '*Dalitanni Koshaatun Baaher Padave*', *Loksatta*, Pune, April 14, 2013. http://epaper.loksatta.com/105717/loksatta-pune/14-04-2013#page/17/1 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

was a demand for literature among Dalits seemed a bit silly, especially when Dr Gaikwad also shared the following experience:

"There are two big newspaper stands in Aurangabad, and in my initial years I went to both of them requesting them to keep and sell copies of '*Prabuddha Bharat*'. One of them flatly rejected saying that there's no demand at all and he won't keep them, while the other one agreed, and is selling copies of many of our books at an ever increasing rate even today."

The points he made were further emboldened when I reached my next stop: *Anand Prakashan*. It was founded by Mr Shankarrao Hatole and Mrs Devayani Hatole, and they have been in publishing since 1979 and till date have published over 1200 titles. Mr Hatole was employed as a librarian, while Mrs Hatole was employed as a teacher in the municipal school, and together they started a bookstall outside their house in 1974 alongside their day-jobs. It began on a small handcart with a stock of around 50 books, mostly books by Dalit scholars and researchers. In their initial years, the couple also frequently travelled to distant cities and villages carrying heavy sacks of books on their backs.

I went to the bookstore where Mr Hatole is available all day and where he frequently has to order chai for people like me who often come more with the intention to talk to him than to just buy books. When I asked him about his motivation for entering publishing, he replied:

"It was necessary to enter into publishing because I met many brilliant Dalit scholars, researchers, and writers who would not be published by the established savarna publishing houses, and their ideas would vanish without notice. Your own uncle's book on the economic thoughts of Babasaheb is an important contribution, and he must find a publisher somewhere if our struggle is to continue. Also, it is most crucial to sustain Babasaheb's thoughts and works. If his books don't reach our next generation like you, how will they ever know him and what he has done for them? With this purpose alone I started this publishing house."

When I asked about the demand among Dalits, his answer too was a resoundingly clear and emphatic 'Yes'. But that wasn't just it. He called up two of his friends who were publishers in other cities, spoke to them

and said, "A friend is sitting next to me. Just answer in one or two lines about the reach and demand for Dalit literature today". And in a matter of five minutes, Mr Hatole's answer was echoed by the other two publishers as well.

But if there's such a demand, then why don't the savarna publishers publish our books?

He continued, "Why should they? Aren't you wrong in expecting our liberation to come from them? I'm always surprised when they do publish us. What makes a Dalit publisher a Dalit publisher is not his caste, but the fact that he's in the publishing field to make sure Babasaheb's thoughts and ideas are never lost. That is most crucial. A Dalit publisher is there to ensure that the Dalit voices do get published, irrespective of the market demand. There are also a couple of savarna publishers who do publish some of our work. But notice their method and motive. They will take only the few big established names from the Dalits, and publish them at high prices and the demand among Dalits will ensure that their books are bought and their pockets filled, plus they also get to call themselves 'progressives'. But that is not anti-caste struggle."

What he said is not just the case with books. The Dalit movement finds expression in songs and poetry too. As Babasaheb himself had remarked, *ten speeches are worth one song of a Shahir*. Poetry, too, has always been a political tool, as my friend and published poet Vaibhav Chhaya also taught me when he declared in the preface of his poetry anthology[85] that *'maajhi kavita hich maajhi raajkiya kruti'* ("My poems are by themselves my political act"). With this reality around me, the accusations of Dalit movement being 'confined' seem to be true in a reverse way, and to these accusers, I say, that the anti-caste movement is all around you. By not being part of it you are isolating and confining yourself; it is not the movement that is confined.

Some would argue, as they often do, that the Dalit movement of this state is 'confined' to the Mahar caste alone. One wishes though that they argued from the marketplaces and the streets instead of just their armchairs.

85 Chhaya, Vaibhav. *'Delete kelela saara aakash'*. *Navata Publications*, Mumbai, 2014.

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We'll set fire to the divisions of caste,
we'll debate philosophical questions in the market place,
we'll have dealings with despised households.
We'll go around in different paths -
Aadupambe! aadu!'

~ Pambatti Cittar[86]

The bookshop nearest to my house is a stall run by Sudhakar Devkar. It is right at the roadside and impossible to miss for any passer-by. On a regular day the stall stocks around 150 English books and 400 Marathi books. Mr Devkar belongs to the Chambhar caste. Along with his two sons, Daulat, aged 12 and Shubham, aged 21, they run three different bookstalls in Aurangabad.

Mr Devkar who was able to study only until Class 10 has had the pleasure of working with Kanshi Ram. During his younger years, he used to follow the rallies of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati with a 25 kg sack of books. Today, he owns a roadside bookstall that is right outside the gates of the Milind Boys Hostel of People's Education Society, and the small bookstall sits perfectly under the shade of a banyan tree. He greeted me with a 'Jai Bhim', the same words engraved on a metal pin on his shirt.

His purpose is clear: "I want our people to be able to afford important books, and become aware, so that one day our people will be seen in government and politics." He has encouraged his elder son, Shubham, to learn DTP (Desktop publishing) and other details of publishing and they have published books on their own.

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86 This verse is from a six hundred-line long Siddha poem, by Pambatti Cittar.
The Tamil Siddha poems are a "grand remonstrance against almost everything that was held sacred" in their time. The Siddhas were "implacable opponents of the caste system and the gradations of orthodoxy and respectability it gave rise to". The period of Siddha poetry stretches from 6th century onwards, with the major contribution peaking between 14 and 18th century. PambattiCittar's poetry has a characteristic refrain aadupambe! aadu! (dance, snake! dance!), the snake as a metaphor for the soul seeking liberation.~ Excerpted from *The Shared Mirror*. http://roundtableindia.co.in/lit_blogs/?p=457 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

After his college hours, Shubham spends all day at the bookstall near the Buddhist *vihara* at the foothills of Aurangabad caves.

His younger brother, Daulat, runs a bookstall cum general store cum godown at the other end of the city near their house. Daulat finishes his school and tuition at 4 p.m., and is at the bookshop till 10 in the night. Talk to either Shubham or Daulat for an hour and I'm sure you'll learn something you hadn't known before.

This then is the real anti-caste movement. It is not about "confining", "owning", or "restricting" ideas. Instead, it has always been about preserving them without loss or distortion. Because it is the very lifeblood for us Dalits and we know what it means to us. Of course, the Dalit movement must also reach the entire savarna world and everyone else. Of course, Dalit literature and Babasaheb must reach the big bookstores and publishers too. Of course, the movement will only be strengthened if the savarnas participate in it in an honest, helpful, and sensible way. Of course! But let us not allow the above aspects, however necessary or not, to distort into becoming the essence of the anti-caste struggle. Because it is not. As Namdeo Dhasal phrased [87]it, *Tyaanchi sanaatan dayaa,* "their sanatan pity", is not the aim or the fuel for this struggle. Further, as Babasaheb remarked, "Lost rights are never regained by begging, and by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggle."

The savarnas can afford to turn a blind eye to their privilege and their known and unknown participation in exploitation and oppression. For the savarnas, this could even be a fancy subject to sound more progressive, or an exotic ideology that feeds their curiosity, or just another topic to write an essay on or something to build their careers around. But for us Dalits, the battle against caste is not some ideology, it is our existence.

So, if my friends aren't reading Babasaheb and other works of Dalit literature, it is not because it is not available to them. The Dalit bookshops are not the ones who are not ready to sell their books to savarnas, it is the savarnas who are not ready to buy these books or stop by at these bookshops and book stalls.

87 Dhasal, Namdeo. Tyaanchi sanaatan dayaa, 'Golpitha'. *AniruddhaPunaravasu*, Mumbai, 1971.

Today, the savarna world's doors are closed and its shutters down. And if these shutters open at all, they're only open somewhat halfway, so that we Dalits must bend our spine to stoop and enter, because sometimes that's the only way the savarnas will allow us to come in front of them. But as the title of a chapter I learned in school said, '*moden pan vaaknar naahi*', "we'll break but won't bend".

Joe D'Cruz on saviours and censors

~ An interview by Kadhiravan

~ There is no objection to liberty in the sense of a right to property, tools and materials as being necessary for earning a living to keep the body in due state of health. Why not allow liberty to benefit by an effective and competent use of a person's powers? The supporters of caste who would allow liberty in the sense of a right to life, limb and property, would not readily consent to liberty in this sense, in as much as it involves liberty to choose one's profession. But to object to this kind of liberty is to perpetuate slavery. For slavery does not merely mean a legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from other the purposes which control their conduct. ~ **Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar**, *Annihilation of Caste*

Liberty and choice in a caste society are absolute rights of the brahmanical classes. The brahmanical classes who own the institution of caste are readily armoured with weapons and sciences to rationalize any choice of conveniences as long as it furthers their class-caste interests. These very weapons come in handy to ostracize the Dalit-Bahujan for any sign of articulation that fails to comply with the immediate diktat of the supremacists.

Joe D'Cruz, the renowned Tamil writer, has been under a series of attacks which have led to his ostracisation. This could be seen as a result of his social background. This became evident recently when he failed to comply with the diktat of the Brahmin translator V. Geetha and the Brahmin publisher S. Anand of Navayana. The latter had earlier entered into a contract to translate and publish his novel '*Aazhi Soozh Ulagu*' in English as '*Ocean Ringed World*', and subsequently retracted following a Facebook post by the writer in support of Modi. It is to be noted that it is the same period during which former Justice Late V R Krishna Iyer, known as a crusader for social justice and as a communist, expressed support to Modi. But in his case, the academic/literary world merely expressed disappointment which never endangered the status and respect earned by the retired judge. One could also measure the space that V R

Krishna Iyer could avail from the Brahmin-Bania Media to justify and rationalize his personal liberty – from the same media that furthered a vicious campaign against Joe D' Cruz. And in Tamil Nadu, the so-called liberal-progressive forces and cultural-literary organizations affiliated to the Left started a nasty campaign against this writer. It is no irony that the same forces in Tamil Nadu had no qualms in pursuing an alliance with AIADMK despite the party's Brahmin leader Jayalalitha's well-known affinity to Modi, despite the ruling party's dubious role in using the state machinery to kill Dalits in *Paramakudi*,[88] and in restraining the same state machinery when violence against Dalits broke out in *Dharmapuri*.[89] As James Michael had pointed out in a Facebook update and noted in an article included in this book (ref. The New Harijan Sewak Sangh), this state of affairs has an analogue in the Brahmin-publisher S. Anand having absolutely no qualms in collaborating with a well-known Modi sympathizer and accomplice - Bibek Debroy, an upper caste economist, for the annotated edition of Babasaheb's seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*.

Joe D'Cruz's novels and other works are of great magnitude and consequence in presenting/documenting the history, life and struggle of the fisher folk in Tamil Nadu. As Babasaheb Ambedkar had observed, the oppressed masses have only the liberty to merely exist; any articulation of their agency to bring any positive change to their communities will be suppressed by the caste society, and they have all the weapons in their armoury to sustain this campaign.

The interview with Joe D' Cruz took place amidst the growing ostracisation initiated by the Brahmin duo V. Geetha and S. Anand in their exercise of 'liberty' and 'choice' to cancel their contract to translate and publish Joe D'Cruz's novel. The subsequent public display of their vicious attack against the author on the Navayana website and in personal interviews in

88 Navayan, Karthik. "What actually happened in Paramakudi and how it happened". *Round Table India*. Published on 26 September, 2011 Available on: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3784:what-actually-happened-in-paramakudi-and-how-it-happened&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

89 Balaji Lakshmipathi@Moses. Caste combined with politics is the culprit: Thirumavalavan. *Round Table India*. Published on 17 July, 2013 Available on: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6761:caste-combined-with-politics-is-the-culprit-thirumavalavan&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132uri (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

Brahmin-Bania media, was met with silent endorsement by the opinion makers in the literary world and savarna media.

(Excerpt from the interview[90] *with the novelist Joe D'Cruz published on Round Table India)*

You have been under a series of attacks. Unlike many other writers and novelists who were vociferously supported by the mainstream, there seems to be a strange silence with regard to your issue. There seems to be a conspiracy to silence you.

There have been some comments from certain sections that Joe D'Cruz is creating a fuss, all of a sudden, to gain popularity. But (in a stern and angry tone) I never volunteered to speak to anyone about these issues, and I do not need to do it. I know very well that society will not offer me a golden crown, for I speak the truth. Since I speak the truth there would naturally be some protest from society, from the community. My community lurks in darkness and leads a primitive lifestyle. When I tell them about their history, their culture, their embracement of Christianity and so on, and when I ask them to seek the truth, it creates a lot of questions and there arises a big question on their lives lived in the darkness—these questions and questionings will lead to a solution.

When someone rises up from the community and speaks up to society that it is painful to be oppressed—when I speak up the truth—it creates a lot of anger. This is because, the people who get angry feel that we, the community, have to live in oppression, lead a low life, live in darkness, so that they could be our saviours. I mentioned in another interview that if the poor people fail to remain poor, if they gain mobility and attain economic development, the so-called godfathers of the poor, the so-called saviours' basic existence would have no meaning. I am talking of the ones who claim to hold the oppressed—the Scheduled Castes, the Arunthathiyars—close.

90 Kadhiravan. "Joe D'Cruz on Aatha's children and their untold stories". *Round Table India*. Published on 13 August, 2015. Available on: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8327:the-story-of-a-literary-seafarer&catid=119&Itemid=132 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

The so-called saviours, if you see who these saviours are—they are always the upper-castes. It is those who are at the top of the social ladder, who pose for pictures with us, hold meetings about us at five-star hotels. You see, they will not care to take the ones they claim to protect to these hotels, but they will take the photographs and videos of the oppressed for elite audiences to portray themselves as the saviours of the oppressed. While doing so, you will see them in International flights, you will see them attending international conferences and seminars, and it is a five-star, no, a seven-star lifestyle that they lead. But, if someone from the Arunthathiyar, Pallar, Paraiyar or fisherfolk community comes up and speaks up, they would want us to get killed, they would dare to kill too, because we tell the truth and they don't like to hear the truth. We have come to write; despite knowing that such things happen, very much anticipating these things and these people.

To serve the cause of people is similar to what *Avvaiyar* said, *Aram Seyya Virumbu* ('love for the righteous thing'). When you are instilled with this love for what is righteous, support for peoples' causes will happen automatically. What has happened to me is the conspiracy of those who showcase themselves to be righteous, but are not in reality righteous.

I have not said much about this issue in any forums, but I have always maintained that these groups which conspire to silence the voices from the oppressed communities, which sideline those who rise from the oppressed, are my enemies and are not my people. Even in Uvari, people had put up placards and banners in praise of me and there were greetings placed in the Uvari Church, which I see as a form of recognition. My people have supported me.

Like you said, publisher S. Anand of Navayana and translator V. Geetha, both of whom refused to go ahead with the publication of the translated version of your award-winning novel, *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* (Ocean Ringed World), epitomise such liberal groups who conspire to silence the voices of the oppressed. In a way, your ostracisation started with S. Anand and V. Geetha's decision not to publish the translated version of your novel.

Before commenting on that, I would like to tell you about *Dhritarashtra alingan* in Mahabharata. Dhritarashtra is a selfish, self-centered person, keen only on his own and his children's welfare. One can say that the entire unfolding of Mahabharata is a result of this attitude of Dhritarashtra. One of his peculiar qualities is that, when he dislikes someone, he would embrace the person and in the process smother him/her to death. I see such groups as possessing this particular quality of Dhritarashtra—they make sure that they keep you under their control and smother you to death.

I did not know about the existence of Navayana and do not maintain any relations with the publisher. I have been greatly involved in the process of translating *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* along with V. Geetha. Everyone knows how difficult it is to read this novel due to the dialect used in it. It is impossible to translate the book without the help of the author. I neither knew about V. Geetha's political inclination or ideology at the time, nor did I care to know. V. Geetha was among the first few who called me and praised my novel at the time of its publication. She volunteered to translate the novel into English and I agreed. For close to three and a half years I worked with her, clarified a lot of things for her, and cared for and gave attention to the translation process—I checked each and every word of the translation to make sure that the meaning and context were not lost during the process.

The Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *Korkai* was not announced at the time and many asked me why *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* was yet to be translated. I used to think it is due to the difficulty in translating the book, but I also felt that there was a deliberate move to stifle the book from being presented to a wider readership. The people who swear by mother Tamil, who claim to be the loyal servants of Tamil—the ones who claim to even breathe Tamil—these people have thrived talking about Tamil, but have done little service to it. They are the ones who have violated mother Tamil. It is one thing to translate foreign scholars, but is it not important to translate the works of Tamil scholars and literati to other languages as well? There have been hardly any efforts undertaken in this direction.

If my novels are translated and presented to a worldwide readership, it would register the presence of my community in the popular psyche

at a larger scale. I often say that there is this particular community which thrives in our society—the brahmins—constituting about three to four percent of this country's population. Everybody knows about their presence, their life, and that they thrive. A community that does not even constitute four per cent of the population lives in the popular imagination of the entire society. There is, however, a community called *Pirada Vannaan*, and how many would even care if the *Pirada Vannaan* thrives or not? The reason is that there is no documentation of the lives of such communities. It is important to document our lives—there has to be poetry, prose, commentaries, short stories, novels—and such documentation has to keep coming. Else, these communities will not even be considered as part of our society. This understanding has come to people like me only recently. It is only now that my eyes are wide open to this reality. This (process of documentation) cannot be done by one single individual and requires the effort of thousands of individuals. When such individuals come out, speak up, it is a threat to the existence of the so-called saviours and they will do everything to stifle such voices, and employ tactics to divert these individuals from these endeavours.

If one group opposes us directly, the other, which travels with us, employs certain methods to misdirect us.

V. Geetha is talented and has clarity in her understanding of society. She was the one who introduced Navayana to me and told me that S. Anand would do his best to promote my book. I went to Delhi for some work and got to meet Anand there. At the very first instance he commented that, "It is not that great a work (referring to the novel) and I can give you a maximum of twenty-five thousand rupees. I can arrange for five to six reviews and you will get five copies of the (translated version) book. This is the best I can do for you." This was the offer. As its author my work is a priceless gem for me. That is how every writer feels. He did not even understand this basic impulse of a writer and talked solely in terms of money. As far as my economic condition goes, I am the President of a shipping company. So I do not need money. I expect recognition and valued criticism from intelligent readers. You can understand how I would have felt to see the ugly mindset of this person. I came to Chennai and apprised V. Geetha of Anand's response but she insisted that he would promote the book well. The agreement was signed at V. Geetha's residence

and I left it to these people to proceed further. I work in a commercial establishment and know the value of a legal document (the agreement). There is a binding obligation on the party to publish my work.

It is then that the Sahitya Akademi Award was announced, and after receiving the award, around April 2014 or so, I posted my support for Modi on Facebook. I do not associate with the ideology of the BJP, or any political party, or their communalism, etc. I was a commoner when I started out in my company and I have climbed to a position without any favour or recommendation. For someone like me, who is from the fishing community, to rise to a certain position, it takes a certain journey. I see Narendra Modi as an individual who has climbed the ranks, after coming from an ordinary background. He is a tea vendor's son after all. I am not singing paeans to Modi, but I see him as an individual who rose from the lower rungs. He appeared to be the best prime ministerial candidate at the time. I see him as someone who came after a lot of struggle, someone for whom it would not have been that easy to sail through the ranks of BJP—there would have been great efforts to sideline him. I saw him as someone who knows pain, humiliation, and hunger. Do you think Rahul Gandhi would know any such pains? Does he know hunger? Would he have seen a ten rupee note, or for that matter even a thousand rupee note? Does he have the need to? This was the thinking behind my support of Modi.

After this statement, I went to Mumbai for a shipping conference and while I was there, there were a series of calls from V. Geetha, who excitedly informed me that my Facebook account was hacked and a statement was posted in support of Modi. I clarified to her politely that it was indeed I who had made the statement. She asked me to change my stance and that it did not adhere to her principles. She told me that she would not publish the translated version of my novel. I said okay but added that the agreement had legal ramifications and I can sue them if they did not respect the contract. But she did not relent. I came down to Chennai and there was such a hue and cry—my communist friends were calling on me asking for clarifications. There was tremendous pressure to strangulate me, my decision. I could have utilised the opportunity—they simply asked me to claim that my account was hacked, but I stood my ground.

You have explained your decision to support Modi, and the kind of ostracisation you faced from the so-called liberal brigade as a result of the decision. But we understand that Navayana's publisher, S. Anand, had no qualms in working with an upper-caste sympathiser of Modi, Bibek Debroy, for preparing the annotated edition of Dr Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*. Do you think Modi is a red herring here? Do you think there was a larger issue at play?

This is all about politics. On the one hand, they would have a Modi sympathiser in their ranks, and on the other, they would employ the discourse around Modi to silence people like me.

There are certain people who claim to be the supporters of Periyar, who brought revolutionary changes to Tamil Nadu. These people live off the fame of Periyar by claiming to be his supporters. But they are actually an insult to the fame and glory of Periyar. In the same way, these people who claim to be supporters of Ambedkar, who live off the fame of Ambedkar, are indeed an insult to Ambedkar's legacy.

Roy-Navayana on Savarkar's Path

~ Rahul Gaikwad

Introduction

~ Gandhi is just an episode in Indian history and not an epoch maker [...] it is the efforts taken on the part of the Congress party to keep celebrating Gandhi through various days, the artificial respirations given to keep Gandhi's memory alive for the nation, otherwise Gandhi if left to the people would be long forgotten from Indian memory. ~

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar *in a BBC interview in 1955.*[91]

These remarks by Babasaheb on Mr Gandhi make it difficult to understand Ms Arundhati Roy's pronouncement, "Gandhi loomed over Ambedkar's world in myriad and un-wonderful ways". Roy's judgment appears in her introduction, 'The Doctor and the Saint', to the new edition of *Annihilation of Caste* (*AoC*) brought out by S. Anand of Navayana. The edition, we are told, is an "Annotated Critical Edition".

The original text was addressed to the Jat Pat Todak Mandal but was eventually not delivered. It was clearly not addressed to Mr Gandhi and makes only a passing reference to him, that too just once in the main text of the speech. Apart from that, the only other references are in his reply to Mr Gandhi's dismissal of the original text which Dr Ambedkar also included as an appendix in the second edition of the book and explained the reasons for doing that. So it is clear that the distortion of the text and its historical setting is accomplished by forcefully dragging in the Babasaheb-Gandhi debate, and thus, diluting the significance of this seminal text. Ms Roy's poor understanding is reflected in how she chooses to see this text from Gandhi's perspective rather than looking at the stand-alone arguments put forth in the text.

91 Full video and a portion of its transcript can be accessed here: http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3797:dr-ambedkar-remembers-the-poona-pact-in-an-interview-on-the-bbc&catid=116&Itemid=128 (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

It is a fact that Babasaheb and his politics involved altercations with Gandhi, however, it was never limited to only denouncing Gandhi. Instead, it evolved with deep reflections on the Indian caste system. His aim was not just to denounce Gandhi but to expose the oppressive and tyrannical nature of the caste system, to bring about a revolution for the oppressed classes who were its victims for thousands of years.

The current propaganda of the mainstream media these days is about how Dalits have become 'intolerant' and are reducing Babasaheb to a 'Dalit Messiah' and are taking an extremist position in not allowing a non-Dalit to write about Babasaheb. These arguments are misleading at best if not diabolical to begin with, because Dalits have never attempted to limit Babasaheb and his work to 'ghettos'. In fact, they have always been on the lookout for allies who wish to honestly further the cause of Babasaheb.

If one looks around in any corner of the country, for any social cause - right from social reform movements to tribal movements - irrespective of which class of citizenry the movement is galvanized for, one would find one of the most committed and selfless cadre coming from the Ambedkarite movement - a movement which has always looked for allies but never lost its fervour if none came forward. So this charge is absolutely baseless and malicious.

But we Ambedkarites are able to call the bluff behind S. Anand and team Navayana's attempt at trying to act as saviours by taking Babasaheb to a *class of people who hitherto have been averse to his ideas*. And that too through a celebrity like Roy who is supposed to don this mantle of the messenger to make Babasaheb's message palatable to this class. This class, needless to point out, is a set of people who are rich savarnas, whites, NRIs i.e. anyone and everyone but Dalits.

Now to this author's mind this exercise is, at best, comparable to Savarkar's attempts to build temples meant exclusively for untouchables.[92] So, in effect, Savarkar didn't allow untouchables to get mainstreamed but under the garb of opening separate temples for untouchables, he reinforced

92 *'Patit Pawan Mandir'* or (one who purifies the degraded), as were built and named by Vinayak Savarkar. His idea of eradicating untouchability can be read in detail here: http://www.savarkar.org/en/social-reforms/eradication-untouchability (Accessed on 14 September, 2015)

the principles of purity and pollution. This idea of separate temples has now been re-introduced by the 21st century avatars of Savarkar – Ms Arundhati Roy and team Navayana, who have tried to create a new edition of an existing text. Moreover, as seen from how they handle the criticism against them, it is clear that the savarnas have become untouchables in an inverse sense, that is all-powerful and beyond criticism. Moreover, the author and the publisher have unabashedly made it plain that Dalits need not read this edition since it is meant exclusively for 'savarna untouchables'. This is also how the expensive price tag stands vindicated according to them. So, if one were to draw parallels with Savarkar's attempt, the Roy-Navayana project is not just discriminatory but also elitist in its purpose.

Now, when we look at the book itself it retains the title *Annihilation of Caste*, but is it the same *Annihilation of Caste* as we know it? The answer is: No. The content of the book, the first half of which is the introduction by Ms Roy, is just a hotchpotch of Babasaheb's work combined with ill-fitting bits about Gandhi's politics. The second half of the book is a distorted version of the original text of Babasaheb's *Annihilation of Caste*.

The original text of *AoC* just seems to be an appendage to Roy's introduction since most of the ideas from *AoC* are not discussed at all. So this introduction by Ms Arundhati Roy is nothing but a rehashing of the age-old Babasaheb-Gandhi comparison bringing forth Gandhi's duplicity and hypocrisy and is mostly about Gandhi's take on caste issues. In a nutshell, it is just another Gandhi-book although it claims to 'expose' Gandhi.

Is it an independent analysis of Babsaheb's politics? If not, why does Ms Arundhati Roy dare to be judgmental about Babasaheb? Or, was this a premeditated attempt to bring down Gandhi in order to appropriate Babasaheb and his work? The questions around appropriation are quite relevant since there is a valid concern that the scholarly denunciation of Hindu religion and its caste system in *AoC* by Babasaheb may well be seen only as a Babasaheb-Gandhi duel by future readers. Since an act of appropriation does not have to only come from the right wing like RSS, appropriation by writers like Roy can create confusion about the original

work and this needs to be prevented, and corrective action needs to be taken.

The extravaganza created around the book makes it seem as if this text of *AoC* was languishing unnoticed and if Roy had not come to its rescue it would be on some extinction list just like the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) issues, the red list of about to be extinct species or endangered species. Now this rescuing angel finds her own name printed in bold letters on the cover page, whereas the original author Babasaheb is not even served this privilege while the title of the book still remains the original *AoC*. She also gets to list herself as a co-author on online retail sites such as *Amazon* etc. What does this signify? If not appropriation, then what?

Instead of targeting the machinations at work which have kept Babasaheb out of savarna and white discourse, she seems to be enjoying the exalted status of having introduced Babasaheb to the ignorant classes. This definitely was the impression this author got when he attended the book release function at St. Xavier's College in Mumbai (video available on YouTube), when Ms Roy, basking in the glory, thundered that "renowned authors are not renowned for nothing, but due to some special skills". So are we supposed to look at this Goddess as a saviour with some special skills and hence welcome this appropriation and its price tag for her 'special skills'?

Isn't this just an ad hoc job done by the Navayana team, roping in a celebrity to attract an audience and thereby capture a profitable chunk of the market? When she writes nonsense like "Constitution comes in the way of revolution", she seems to be suggesting that Dalits should take to the streets, neglecting education, and leave the entire intellectual space to pop intellectuals and appropriators like her.

If Dalits are able to assert themselves more emphatically now, it is largely because of reservations guaranteed by the constitution. And this formed the very basis of political organisations like BSP in its formative years when mainly the government employees could be brought together under one umbrella. Was that not a revolution in itself? Did it not come

through constitutional means? This essentially reveals that Roy is against democratic ideals.

What this attempt does to those who have been fighting all along

Suddenly, their efforts are ghettoised just like their homes. Suddenly, these are people without any credentials, from whom Babasaheb has to be 'rescued' (read stolen) and placed on a cloistered pedestal. While all along it was the Dalits who kept fighting to keep Babasaheb's work alive. All of a sudden, they find a stranger, who 'takes the trouble' of reading *AoC* and writing a half-baked introduction, now attending conferences all over the world as if she is the only person standing for the cause.

Ms Roy is not only ignorant but also reluctant to admit the crucial role of social capital in furthering her career. Instead of acknowledging it, she claims that it is her special skills which make her eligible for writing this introduction. This attempt not only damages Babasaheb's work but also steals from the Dalits their basic social capital - Babasaheb and his thoughts, actions and his principles which are a guiding light for them. This is nothing but brahminical paternalism manifesting itself in the most sophisticated and dangerous form. Dangerous because it gets approval from most progressives and is reified as radical.

It steals from even those people who gave up on their promising professional careers only to struggle to emancipate their fellow oppressed. And who rules the consciousness of all these brave ones? Only Babasaheb, of course! Now, who has borne the cost of their sacrifices? Is it only their immediate families, their community or the Dalits? I am sure the cost is borne by the entire society, entire nation; perhaps a few of them could well have made important contributions to the fields of industry, science, technology or administration. Denying their contribution is denying their existence and encroaching upon their space. It is the resistance offered by them, often single-handedly, which has been the forte of the Ambedkarite movement.

So this is an appropriation with scant regard for authorship, authenticity, struggles, sacrifices or empathy. The only purpose of this appropriation was to cater to a select class of people viewed as a new market. For Roy,

AoC may well become the key towards super stardom but for Dalits, Babasaheb's thoughts are the only capital to educate them and keep them aligned to a common goal.

But Babasaheb could not be defeated or appropriated by his contemporaries, nor can the present lot of thieves or cowards manage that.

Authors, Speakers, Translators, Artists, Interviewers

Akshay Pathak is a writer. He has previously worked in theatre and publishing. He can be contacted at pathak.akshay@gmail.com

Anoop Kumar is the founder-editor of *Insight Young Voices*. The focus of his activism includes documenting caste discrimination in academic spaces and politicization of students towards anti-caste politics and history. He is a teacher in Wardha.

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Asha Kowtal is the General Secretary of the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM).

Bojja Tharakam, senior advocate in the AP High Court, was the founding president of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha, state convener of the Chunduru Struggle Committee, and as an advocate fought for the survivors of the Karamchedu massacre. In 1989, he became the founding General Secretary of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Andhra Pradesh. He is also Founding Trustee of Dr B.R. Ambedkar Memorial Trust set up in 1984 to disseminate Ambedkar's Philosophy and has been involved in the official project of translation of B.R. Ambedkar's writings into Telugu and was co-editor for volume one, four and ten. He was the editor of the dalit little magazine 'Nalupu' (1991-94) and since its foundation in 2008, of 'Neeli Jenda' (Blue Flag).

Dr B. Ravichandran is a founding member of *Dalit Camera: Through Un-Touchable Eyes*. Currently he is a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS), Shimla.

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Dr Sangeeta Pawar is Associate Professor at the Department of Commerce, University of Mumbai and has presented at and chaired sessions for various national and international conferences. She has written several

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Gaurav Somwanshi, an alumnus of IIM Lucknow, is currently preparing for civil services examinations.

Gee Imaan Semmalar lives in Bangalore. He left academia disturbed by the casteism he witnessed in JNU. Now, he is a student of anti-caste politics outside academia.

Gurinder Azad is a bilingual (Hindi and Punjabi) poet, writer, translator, filmmaker and human rights activist. His first book of poetry in Hindi, 'Conditions apply', was published recently.

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Joby Mathew, an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, is doing PhD in Center for Human Rights at University of Hyderabad. He is working on 'Land and Caste: A study of Land Reforms in Kerala'.

Joe D'Cruz is a renowned Tamil writer, novelist, documentary film maker and playwright, famous for his novels, *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* and *Korkai*. He was born in a fisherfolk community, in the coastal village of Uvari in Tamil Nadu; Joe's novels and his works revolve around the life, struggle, history, culture, and other marks of the coastal people in Tamil Nadu. His novel *Korkai* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013. His documentary

movies *Vidiyatha Pozhuthukal* (2008) and *Towards Dawn* (2010) also present the life and sufferings of Tamil fisherfolk.

Joopaka Subhadra is a Telugu poet, writer, columnist and activist based in Hyderabad. Her writings include 'Ayyayyo dammakka' (collection of poetry), 'Raayakka manyam' (collection of short stories) and translation of Bama's Tamil novel 'Sangadi' into Telugu as 'Sangathi' apart from numerous other poems, short fiction, reviews and songs which appeared in prominent newspapers and magazines. She writes a regular column in 'Bhumika', Telugu feminist magazine, and has edited 'Nalla Regadi Saallu' (a collection of short stories by Madiga women), 'Kythunakala dandem' (collection of Madiga poetry). She is also active in 'Matti poolu', an SC, ST, BC, Minority women writers' forum.

Kadhiravan is a student of Dr B. R. Ambedkar; works in a Public Sector Undertaking.

Kankipati Sarat Chandra is a painter, web and print designer based in Hyderabad.

Karthik Navayan is a human rights activist and scholar based in Hyderabad.

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KK Baburaj is a cultural critic, political commentator and activist with anti-caste perspective. He is based in Kerala and has taken active part in what is considered by many as a major new trend in Dalit thought.

K. Satyanarayana, Associate Professor, EFL University, Hyderabad. His publications include *No Alphabet in Sight, New Dalit Writing from South India* (with Susie Tharu), *Steel Nibs are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India* (with Susie Tharu).

Murali Shanmugavelan (555390@soas.ac.uk) is a PhD candidate in School of Oriental and African Studies. His research topic is 'Everyday communicative practices of an Arundhathiyar community in Tamil Nadu'.

The field site (a discriminated Dalit colony) is an ostracised public space and the people (Arundhathiyars) are the most oppressed group (called Dalit among Dalits) in Tamil Nadu. His research is about making sense of how structural and personal discriminations influence and shape Arundhathiyars' everyday articulations to survive with dignity.

Naren Bedide (Kuffir) is Contributing Editor, *Round Table India*.

Nidhin Shobhana (Donald) is a writer and an artist. He is a programme associate with National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, New Delhi.

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Sunny M Kapicadu is one of the most prominent Dalit activists and intellectuals in Kerala. He has been active in all the subaltern protests in Kerala over the past few years. He is an employee of LIC.

Suresh Mane is a political and social activist associated with the Bahujan movement founded by Manyawar Kanshi Ram. He actively participated in BAMCEF, Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samithi (DS4) and was a founding member of Bahujan Samaj Party. He has a PhD in Law with specialization in Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Criminal Law from the University of Mumbai, and has worked as a professor in the university for a long time, and has also mentored many research students. Dr Mane now leads the Bahujan Republican Socialist party.

Syama Sundar Unnamati hails from Vijayawada. He has an MA in English Literature from Pondicherry Univesrsity, and is pursuing PhD from JNU, after his MA (History) and MPhil there. Initially, he used to draw cartoons for college magazines but when Facebook became very

popular, he started posting them online, on the advice of friends. Dalit literature and Dr Ambedkar's writings exerted a strong influence on him, therefore Ambedkarite ideology and anger is markedly reflected in his art work. Currently, he is teaching Indian History to graduate students in Vijayawada.

Sruthi Herbert, born and brought up in Kerala, is currently a doctoral candidate at SOAS, University of London. She finds herself probing questions at the intersections of caste, class, gender, and religion.

Thongam Bipin is pursuing PhD at University of Hyderabad. He is writing his dissertation on the trajectory of evolution of Meetiei nationalism in the twenteith century.

U. Sambashiva Rao, who is the Chairman of the BC Mahajana Sangham, has played an active part in many people's movements - starting with ultra left Marxist-Leninist struggles to identity based agitations inspired by Ambedkar-Phule thought - in Andhra Pradesh over the last forty years.

Vaibhav Wasnik is a researcher and he blogs at http://debatedalit.blogspot.in/.

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HATRED IN THE BELLY

Politics behind the appropriation of Dr Ambedkar's writings

Hatred in the Belly is a Telugu phrase (kaDupulO kasi) taken from a speech delivered by poet Joopaka Subhadra, in Hyderabad, on the appropriation of Babasaheb Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste. The speech, included in this volume, aptly summarises the deep-seated hostility of Brahmanic India towards the Dalit Bahujan.

Similarly, the other essays and speeches collected in this volume, written and delivered by a number of writers, academics, students, and activists (referred to as the Ambedkar Age Collective in this book), unfurl before you a critical tapestry dissecting the hegemonic brahmanic discourse which works towards delegitimizing the radical legacy of Amebdkarite thought. The most stark example of these efforts, from the 'left' and the 'right' of the Indian political spectrum, is the Navayana edition of Babasaheb's AoC with an 'introduction' by Arundhati Roy.

This collection emerged as a spontaneous critique of the Roy-Navayana project from multiple locations and in multiple languages.

The interventions, which began online, and the discursive terrains that opened up offer us a glimpse of the ways through which the marginalised resist continued attempts made at hegemonising their knowledge and lives by the brahmanic oppressors, irrespective of their political leanings.

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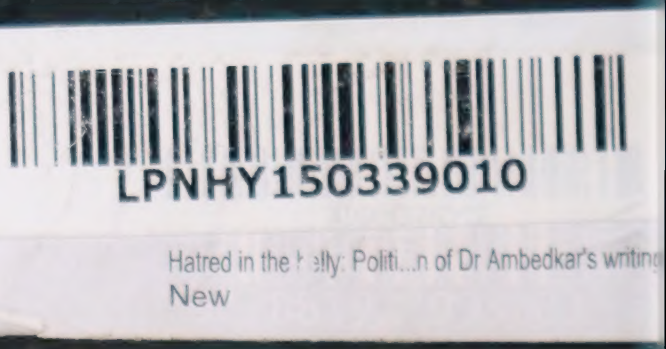

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